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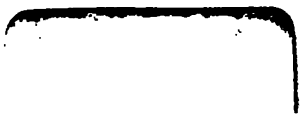
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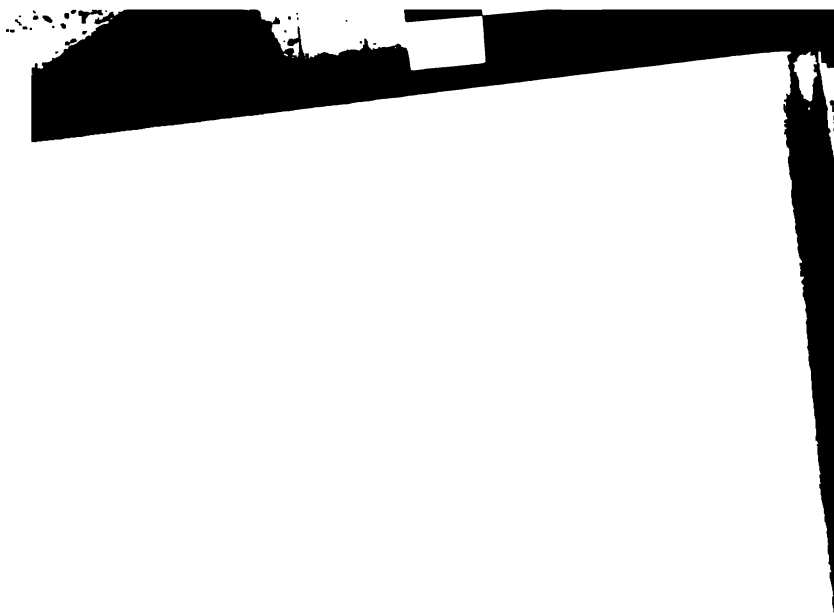
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ETHEL
OPENS
THE
DOOR

DAVID
FOX













**ETHEL OPENS
THE DOOR**



ETHEL OPENS THE DOOR

*AN EXPLOIT OF
THE SHADOWERS, INC.*

By

~~DAVID FOX~~ pseud.

Author of "The Man Who Convicted Himself"

I. E. Osherson



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ROBERT M. McBRIDE & COMPANY

1922

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CHAPTER I

ROBERT BRINGS A CARD

“**T**HOSE handsomely engraved circulars which we sent out seem to have been bloomers, except for the Punderford case, Rex.” George Roper, ex-confidence man and now member of the unique band of former criminals, who had organized a discreet detective agency under the name of ‘The Shadows’ turned lugubriously to their chief. “As long as we are not interfering with the authorities in their own particular field and none of us are—er—‘wanted,’ don’t you think we might be a trifle more open in our method of soliciting clients?”

“You must admit, George, that the Punderford affair was highly profitable,” remarked Lucian Baynes defensively as he twirled his small, blond mustache. He looked more like the fastidious, dapper, rather innocuous man of fashion than the most astute smuggler who ever kept the customs officials of more than one country on the qui vive, and who was one of the greatest art connoisseurs and jewel experts of his time. “Surely we can afford to wait awhile for other fish to come to our nets.”

“Of course *you* are satisfied, Luce, for that was your special case and you covered yourself with glory in it!” Phil Howe, one-time safe-breaker sighed and his merry but

furtive eyes clouded. "I wouldn't mind a little action myself, and if I hadn't given Rex here my word not to turn another single trick—?"

He paused suggestively and glanced at the well-built, aristocratic looking man of forty-five, who sat at the head of the council table, but Rex Powell's level gray eyes were fastened upon the high-bred, sensitive face of the eccentric individual opposite, who sat reflectively stroking the rather weak chin to which a black mustache and goatee had so recently lent distinction with long, slender, tapering fingers; those fingers which until he had joined The Shadders and had become a handwriting expert had turned out the cleverest forgeries and counterfeit bank notes of the decade.

"What do you say, Cliff?" Rex Powell asked at last. "It's true, of course, that only one case has come our way as yet and even though we succeeded in solving it—or rather, Luce did with our co-operation—it is bound to be a waiting game at best. Punderford is grateful, but naturally he will be wary about recommending us lest it arouse awkward questions, and wild horses couldn't drag from anyone else connected with that affair an admission that they had ever heard of our organization. Are you, too, becoming discouraged?"

"Not by a long shot!" Clifford Nichols responded stoutly. "Aside from the fact that the association with you fellows has given me a new lease of life since you dragged me from that Bronx flat where I was brooding myself into neurasthenia over my last—er—enforced retirement, this game is bound to liven up on the average of percentage if





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for no other reason. Let me see, Rex; you sent out five hundred circulars to as many society women, did you not?"

Rex nodded without speaking and the other pursued:

"As I remember you suggested that if the lady who received the circular found herself in need of any discreet, strictly confidential investigation by a private corporation of gentlemen, not blackmailers nor inefficient bunglers, she should send her card to us; that we were not connected with any so-called private detective agency, gave no information to the press, permitted no publicity and never carried our results to the authorities unless requested to do so by our clients. Is that right?"

"Absolutely," Rex replied. "I particularized by mentioning the fact that we undertook no divorce evidence, nor investigation of a scandalous or trivial nature, but if any jewels or valuable documents were missing, if the personal safety of anyone were endangered, or forgery suspected, or blackmail attempted it would be well to communicate with us. I sent five hundred other letters differing slightly in tone, to financiers, both active and retired, all over the country."

"Exactly," Cliff summed up. "Don't you think that of the four hundred and ninety-nine matrons and five hundred magnates a certain percentage of them are bound to come to us sooner or later with delicate matters which they would not take to the authorities for worlds and yet could not handle by themselves? I'm not wasting my time; those books on reading character by handwriting which you installed in my private library will merit months of study

still. This may be a waiting game, old man, but I'll sit tight and play with what I hold."

The sixth and last of the regular members of The Shad-owners had taken no part in the discussion. He was an exceedingly fat, exceedingly bald man of perhaps fifty, with a round benevolent face which had been peculiarly suited to his former vocation of manufacturing and selling fake medicines. A chemist of no mean ability, Henry Corliss might have risen high as a toxicologist by reason of his profound researches into the lesser known poisons, but the lure of the easier way had long ago proved too much for his easy-going nature, and he had placidly administered innocuous cures to hypochondriacs for many years, interrupted only by certain periods spent as an involuntary guest of the outraged and exasperated authorities. Now, as a medical expert, he had already proved himself a valued adjunct to the organization.

When their leader turned inquiring eyes upon him he chuckled and rubbed his plump hands together.

"Oh, I'll trail, with Cliff," he announced. "Of course it had to be one of the dames who rose to our bait first; men are more cagey, and it would be only as a last resort that they would nibble, but once they do we'll have them hook, line and sinker, to make use of Luce's metaphor. Did you know that the small office just across the corridor is rented at last?"

The room in which they were seated was hexagonal in shape and almost spartan in its simplicity, but the Jacobean table, the massive chairs and rugs of obvious antiquity all



bespoke the quiet elegance of a gentleman's study rather than the sanctum of the head of a detective firm. In each of the six sides of the wall was a panel, five of them leading into the respective laboratories and studies of the five other regular members, but the last connected with the anteroom which was presided over by the only feminine association of the organization. She was a fluffy, golden-haired young person with guileless blue eyes and a diffident expression of girlish innocence which had proved her salvation on the one unfortunate occasion when a relentless store detective had haled her to court on the well-grounded charge of attempting to "lift" a two-hundred-dollar lace collar, and the fatherly judge had left her off on her own recognizance because, as she once informed Cliff without braggadocio, she had 'buffaloed him with her baby stare."

Only one other person had ever detected her at work and that was Rex Powell. With the plan for organizing the Shadows in mind he had approached her tentatively but finding her totally lacking in ethics of any sort and unregenerate in her attitude toward society he carefully concealed the real purpose of the association from her and led her to believe that they proposed to work a novel and stupendous scheme of graft and crime. With all the small boy's worship of the train robber of fiction, Ethel Jepson had been proud to cast her lot unquestioningly with theirs, and the result had already manifested the wisdom of Rex's choice.

Now while the Shadows discussed the probabilities of

the future she was sitting behind her desk, which immediately faced the entrance door of the suite, unconcernedly masticating wintergreen gum and reading the latest thriller in best-sellers, when the door opened. Ethel glanced up and without change of expression she closed the book and one hand slipped beneath the desk's edge while with the other she touched a bit of inlaid wood upon its top.

Thereafter several things happened almost simultaneously in the council chamber. At Henry Corliss' abrupt question Rex had asked quickly:

"Do you mean the office that has been vacant ever since we opened up here? I wonder what kind of business is going to be conducted from there, and what type of man is running it? Did you get a look at him? It is important for us to know."

"On the possibility that someone might be shadowing the Shadows, eh?" suggested George Roper.

It was at that precise moment that Ethel, in the outer office, closed her book and as though in answer to the query of the ex-swindler and confidence man something clicked faintly and Rex Powell with a warning gesture to the rest, touched the invisible spring concealed under the edge of the table.

Instantly a masculine voice came to their ears.

"Excuse me. There is no name on the door and I was unaware that this office was occupied." The tones were strong but oddly hesitant. "May I ask what firm this is?"

"Confidential information bureau." A faint ticking mingled with Ethel's glib response as she gave the defini-



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tion of their organization which the Shadows had agreed upon for anyone who ventured within their precincts ignorant of their real purpose.

"I thought that I might find a spare window pole in here." The voice continued still somewhat uncertainly. "I'm the new tenant in the office across the hall and I rang for the superintendent but my bell seems to be out of order."

The eyes of the listening Shadows were fastened upon the panel which gave into the outer office, when close beside it a tiny slit like those in a slot machine, appeared in what had seemed to be the solid wood and through it a narrow tape of paper curled. At a nod from Rex, George Roper's lank, funereally clad form disengaged itself from his chair and gliding noiselessly over to the slit he tore off the tape at a point where its tiny typed characters gave place to a blank space, and returning to the table he spread it out before the others.

"'Big young man tanned store clothes good quality looks like movie Westerner,'" they read. "'Think window pole stall try vamp what dope I can.'"

The message from the diminutive, silent keyboard which Ethel held concealed upon her lap had scarcely been grasped by the sextette when her voice came to them, its accents provocatively lowered.

"That's too bad! I'm sorry, sir, that we haven't a window pole; that is, I don't think that we have, but I am new here myself. Shall I ask one of the clerks?"

"Oh, no, don't bother, please." The intruder's tone be-

trayed a shade of nervous impatience which was as quickly controlled. "I presume one of the elevator men can get the superintendent for me. Sorry to have troubled you."

"It isn't any trouble, sir. If you've just taken that office perhaps you are looking for a stenographer? I know one I could recommend you who's a wiz—I mean, very quick and accurate, if personality and—er—looks don't count."

"Thank you." He spoke drily. "I do not need a stenographer yet. What sort of information does this firm of yours supply?"

"Search—that is, I really couldn't say." Ethel's voice was bland and silky, but the little tape reeled off disgustingly through the aperture in the wall:

"Dont vamp worth a cent just nose."

Aloud she continued: "I don't know their clients' business. I only receive them and show them in to one of the firm. The clerk might be able to tell you—"

"It doesn't matter." The man interrupted her hurriedly. "I'll get the superintendent now. Thanks."

The entrance door opened and closed with a thud and the dapper little expert on safes remarked ruefully:

"Another false alarm and it looked like a prospect at last! Book agents, solicitors for ads. or charity and now our new little playmate across the hall. Nothing stirring and all our grand talent going to waste!"

"Perhaps we'll have better luck next time, Phil. It's too bad, though, that she didn't find out what our neighbor's own line is, since he was so curious about ours."



Rex picked up the receiver of his desk telephone, and spoke into it. "Come in for a minute, Ethel, please."

The panel slipped aside and Miss Jepson presented herself, complacently patting the blobs of yellow hair which adorned her ears.

"Did I pull it off all right, Mr. Powell?" she asked. "He is just a kind of a boob, I guess; I gave him a nifty little opening to say something pretty to me and then I could have kidded him along, but it went 'way over his head. He looks as though he was more used to ridin' a range, anyway, than sitting cooped up in an office."

"Then you don' think he might be a plainclothes man trying to investigate our game, my dear child?" George queried.

"Who, him?" Ethel's small nose wrinkled in fine scorn. "He's no dick! Whatever business he's starting he'd better look sharp or the wise ones of this burg will pick him clean. He has got nice eyes, though."

"That will do, Ethel. You had better go to lunch now," Rex said hastily, adding as the panel closed behind her: "It is perhaps as well for the secrecy we have maintained that our neighbor did not prove susceptible to Ethel's rather elemental blandishments."

"Oh, she is a loyal infant, I'll say that for her, although I admit that her form of speech grates on one's sensibilities at times." Lucian Baynes shuddered fastidiously. "I have no doubt that in her secret soul she is wondering why we do not turn another trick but she has faith enough in us to wait without question. I think I will get a bite

myself and then stroll up to the Lejune galleries; they have an exhibition of etchings on including a Whistler that I once endeavored to remove from the collection of Sir Algernon Lennox but without success. I should like to have a look at it again for old times' sake."

Cliff Nichols rose also.

"Rex, lend me a ten-spot, will you? It is too late to go to the bank now, and look at what some shop or other handed me yesterday!" he displayed a crisp, new ten-dollar bill. "Fancy anyone shoving the queer on me!"

"Of course, old man, but is that actually phony?" Rex pulled out his wallet. "It looks good to me."

"Perhaps, but to an experienced eye there is just a shade of difference between the engraving on it, and that on the product of the Mint. I shouldn't care to attempt passing it, with my record." Cliff shrugged. "So are the mighty fallen!"

When he, too, had taken his departure Henry Corliss gazed inquiringly about at the other three.

"What do you boys say to a planked steak around the corner at the Hilliard?" he suggested, his small eyes twinkling in anticipation. "They serve a good thick one with oodles of vegetables—"

Phil Howe shook his head in mock regret but a sly grin played about the corners of his close-shaven lips.

"I've got a date, so I suppose it will be cold lobster and peach short cake for mine!" he mourned. "That's the trouble with a skirt; they may be all there with the looks



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but when it comes to ordering regular food for a white man—!"

"Hush!" Rex held up a warning hand once more. "Someone is rapping on the entrance door. Don't you hear it?—George, go and see who it is and if you think it is worth while for us to listen in, press that small inset of lighter wood on Ethel's desk."

"And if it isn't worth while I'll give the intruder a bawling out that no bally-hoo of my early circus days could equal!" George promised darkly as he got up again from his chair, and then with a comical return to his ministerial manner he added: "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick and the temper short, my brethren!"

Rex touched the concealed spring beneath the edge of the table once more and Phil halted on the way to his study, while even Henry forgot his appetite momentarily. It was evident that George had pressed the spring in Ethel's desk in passing so as to take no chances, for they distinctly heard the opening of the door and his unctous tones inquiring:

"You were looking for someone, my good man?"

"Yes sir, I—I must have been mistaken, but I was quite certain that this was the right number, sir." A quavering, elderly voice replied. "If you'll excuse me—"

"Perhaps I can help you if you will tell me whom you want to see." George's tone had grown more business-like. "Come in."

The door closed and then the elderly voice came again more tremulous and uneasy than before.

"It is very good of you, sir, but the matter is a—a confidential one, in a manner of speaking. I have a message from my employer for a certain corporation whose circular read that they had an office in this building. I—I have brought a card."

Behind the panel Phil gave vent to a little yelp of exultation which he smothered by clapping his hands over his mouth as Rex glared at him. Henry's rotund form had stiffened with attention.

"Your employer's visiting card?" George asked smoothly. "Are you by any chance looking for the Shadowers?"

"Yes, sir, that was the name." The man's voice rose eagerly.

"Then you have come to the right place. We are the Shadowers," announced George. "Give me the card and sit down. Our secretary is out at present but I myself will see if the president of our firm is in his private office. —Ah, Mr. Phineas Dilworth Sneed?"

He raised his voice as he read the name from the card and Rex moved over to the files in the tall case and ran hastily through them.

"I am his butler and valet. Mr. Sneed is very much upset, sir, and I was to ask that someone would come at once to consult him."

Rex had found what he sought and now he took a card from the index file and laid it silently before his colleagues. They read:—

"Phineas Dilworth Sneed. 60-65. Retired capitalist, rated at over a million. Residence, Burlingame Hotel.



Widower. Collector of curios. No clubs. Associates unknown."

"What hunch made you select him as one of the five hundred to whom to send a circular, Rex?" murmured Henry. "The result proved that you made a good guess, all right, but there is nothing in those notes to suggest that he might have a skeleton in his closet."

"Isn't there?" Rex responded in a whisper. "Take the last three items. Half of the pleasure any collector takes in his possessions is in exhibiting them to his friends, not merely in hoarding them up to gloat over in secret. As far as I was able to gather the man is practically a recluse. Think it over."

The voice of George Roper came to them once more from the outer office.

"A consultation would be a mere waste of time until we know the nature of the affair which is troubling Mr. Sneed. We have experts for each separate line of investigation. Did your employer take you into his confidence?"

"Yes, sir, to a certain extent." The man coughed deprecatingly. "My wife and I have been with him for a great many years, and as he is all alone—"

"Go on." George was plainly giving his leader time to look up the data on their prospective client. "I understand. What is it Mr. Sneed wishes us to investigate for him?"

"It's a matter of—of an anonymous letter, sir." The butler spoke in a low, shocked tone as though the mention of such a thing in connection with his employer savored of

outrage. "Mr. Sneed would have paid no attention to it, I am sure, but he has many valuables in his apartments and he could not be certain that the letter was the work of a crank. He thinks that in some way his safe has been tampered with, too, but we don't see how that could be, my wife and I, for one or the other of us are always at hand."

"The safe!" Phil Howe ejaculated under his breath. "I can see where one dame gets a stand-up for luncheon!"

"An anonymous letter, and Cliff off the job." Henry shook his head. "Let's have a look at the old retainer out there, Rex."

As he spoke the panel leading from the outer office was pushed aside and George entered, carefully closing it after him.

"You heard?"

Rex nodded, switched off the dictaphone and put away the card which he had taken from the index file.

"Bring him in," he said. "Henry, it would be as well for you not to appear in person until we know whether there will be anything in your line in this case or not. You can listen from your laboratory."

Henry reluctantly edged his plump body through the aperture leading to his sanctum and the panel had scarcely closed when George ushered in their visitor. He was a very old man, almost totally bald, and his bent form shook as though with palsy, but there was a shrewd gleam in his faded eyes as he glanced from Phil to his older companion.

"This is the head of our firm, Mr. Powell. You must



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tell him what you have just told me." George added: "The other gentleman is our expert on safes, and you may speak in the strictest confidence for your employer."

"You come from Mr. Phineas Sneed about an anonymous letter which he has received, I understand?" Rex came to the point without preamble. "What is your name?"

"Robert, sir, Robert Frost." The old man bowed tremulously.

"Sit down, Robert. When did this letter come?"

"In the morning's mail, sir. I put it beside Mr. Sneed's plate at breakfast along with his newspaper and I never gave it another thought until I saw his face as he opened it. It fairly gave me a turn!" He caught himself up and added hurriedly: "Mr. Sneed has been quite uneasy lately about his safe, and I think he is afraid that the letter has something to do with a robbery, sir."

"H'm! A thief doesn't usually advertise his coming," Rex observed. "Did your employer show you the letter, Robert?"

"No, sir. He'd finished his fruit and I was just pouring his coffee when he picked up the envelope and slit it with his knife. My eyes aren't as good as they used to be," he added ingenuously. "I could only see that there was more than one page to it and the writing was large and sprawly. Mr. Sneed made a queer little noise in his throat as though he was choking and he put one hand up to his neck. I—I was afraid he was going to have a stroke for his face got all gray, like, and I had to speak to him two or three times before he heard me."

"What did you say?" Rex asked.

"I hardly remember, sir, I was that upset myself at seeing him so." The butler passed his hands nervously about the brim of his hat which he held between his knees. "He just waved me away and sat there reading the letter over and over, and after a while he got up and went in his room and shut the door. He never touched his coffee or the rest of his breakfast. I waited, but Jane—that's my wife, sir,—Jane said I ought to go and speak to him and see if anything was the matter. When I knocked he came out with the letter still in his hand, but he looked all right again. He went to the safe and put the letter away and got out your circular."

"Ah, yes, I believe he was included in the list of those to whom they were sent." Rex nodded, with a side glance at George.

"And very angry he was when it came." Once more the old man checked his garrulous tongue. "I—I mean, sir, that he must have thought someone was trying to play a joke on him, for Mr. Sneed has had no need of—of detectives in all the years we have been with him until now. He told me that the letter he got this morning was unsigned and threatening, and he thought it must be the work of some crazy person but he wasn't sure. I was to come to you and tell you that money would be no object if you would find the person who wrote it and see that Mr. Sneed was protected from further annoyance. Those were his words, sir."

"But Mr. Sneed is not sure that it was written by a



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crank." Rex paused. "You said something about his fear of a robbery—?"

"Well, sir, Mr. Sneed has a safe that was built to order for him and he thought no one else could work it but himself. He's got an idea lately, though, that somebody has been tampering with it. He didn't say anything about it this morning but I could see it was on his mind." The butler rose as though fearful he had said too much. "He can tell you all about it himself, sir, if you will come. I have a taxi downstairs."

"Mr. Howe and Mr. Roper will accompany me," Rex said as he took up his hat and stick. "It is unfortunate that our handwriting expert is not in, but when he returns I will see that he is sent on to us. Your employer still resides in the Burlingame Hotel?"

"Of course, sir!" Robert looked his astonishment at the question. "He has the whole top floor remodeled to suit him and he has lived there for more than ten years."

"George, you and Phil go down to the taxi with Mr. Sneed's man," Rex directed in an undertone. "I have some instructions to leave here for the others when they get back."

"I suppose this means that I am going to be left behind!" Henry emerged from his seclusion as the others departed.

"Nothing in it for you, old man, nor for Lucian either, as yet," Rex responded. "Tell him to stick around, though and await developments, but send Cliff on to the Burlingame as soon as you have given him an outline of the case."

"Humph! It doesn't look like much of a case to me," grunted the other. "Some crank must have picked on the old guy and driven him into a blue funk, that's about the size of it."

Rex shook his head.

"Don't be too sure, Henry," he said. "Sneed is not in his dotage by any means and there is more back of this than the butler has told, or his employer would never have sent for assistance from outside. There may be work for all of us before the case is finished."



CHAPTER II

A REFRACTORY CLIENT

THE Burlingame was one of the oldest and most exclusive hotels in the city and the upward march of trade on the Avenue had not succeeded in dislodging it from its original site, a few blocks below the Park. Although small in comparison to the huge caravansaries which had sprung up seemingly overnight in the heart of the metropolis it held its place in history and if its former glories were somewhat dimmed the clientele to which it had catered for three generations were staunch patrons still. Phineas Sneed with his ten-year occupancy of the top floor was a comparative newcomer and Rex Powell wondered as the taxi sped uptown what inducements he could have offered to the proprietor to permit the remodeling of his apartments, for the house was as famous for its mid-Victorian architecture and decorations as for the excellence of the cuisine.

As they entered the lobby a gray-haired clerk with the dignity of a bank president looked up from behind the desk and an elderly waiter paused with uplifted tray at the door of the dining-room, while the portly, middle-aged captain of the bell-boys—none of whom appeared to be under fifty,—stepped forward inquiringly.

Sneed's butler drew him aside for a moment and Phil Howe whispered irrepressibly to Rex:

"Some swift place the old boy lives in! I'll bet they never had anything more exciting here than a G.A.R. convention!"

The man whom he and the rest of the Shadowers knew as Rex Powell made no reply. For a moment his associates, the case upon which they were just embarking, and the daring adventures and vicissitudes of his self-chosen criminal career had faded from his mind and he was once again a small boy treading the same tessellated marble floor of the lobby in the wake of a tall, slim, aristocratic woman whom he had called mother, on the occasion of more than one formal visit to some cousins.

He aroused himself from his reverie with a start as George Roper's voice sounded in his ears.

"Robert has evidently satisfied the major-domo that we are the proper sort of people to enter these sacred if somewhat musty portals, for he is leading the way to the elevator. Ah, my friend, if he had only an inkling of our former vocations!"

The clerk had bent once more over his ledger and the bell-boy captain returned to his station, but the elderly waiter still stood in the dining-room door as they passed with his tray upheld upon a knarled, rheumatic hand.

"The elevator stops at the floor below Mr. Sneed's apartments, sir," Robert volunteered as they began a slow and dignified ascent. "He had a special stairway built in when his rooms were remodeled."



"Were the alterations very extensive?" Rex asked.

"Oh, yes, sir. The employees of the hotel all sleep in the annex and the top floor was cut up into small suites for the guests, less expensive than those lower down. Mr. Sneed had it all thrown into one.—But here we are, sir."

He preceded them down the corridor to a small door in which he inserted a key. It opened upon a tiny square hall from which a narrow staircase led up to an anteroom as limited in size as the private entrance just below, but furnished with two heavily carved chairs. The door which faced them was massively carved also and adorned with an antique brass knocker which Robert lifted twice and let fall resoundingly before he produced a huge, quaintly fashioned bronze key.

George Roper uttered a slight exclamation which he as quickly changed into a cough, but Rex did not heed. He was gazing up at the single small window high in the wall at the stairs' head through which a tiny ray of sunlight gleamed.

"You said, Robert, that Mr. Sneed occupied the entire floor here? This hall and staircase must be about in the center of the area upon which the hotel is built," he remarked. "That window up there cannot look out upon the yards in the rear of the private dwellings on the side street."

"No, sir." The key rattled in the lock beneath the guidance of the butler's tremulous hand. "Mr. Sneed left a square inner court open to the sky when he planned the alterations and the rooms are built all around it, but it is

so ugly that he had the windows put up high like that so he wouldn't have to look out on it."

The key turned and the great door swung inward disclosing a reception room with wide windows at the farther end which looked out on the Avenue. It was furnished austere, with the chairs backed against the wall and a plain mahogany table in the center, upon which stood a bronze lamp of ancient design.

That was the only touch of the ornamental which the room contained save for two mediocre pictures which hung one on either side of the bare marble mantel surmounted by a huge gilt mirror that reflected the bent, palsied form of the butler as he moved to a door which stood ajar in the right wall and knocked upon it.

A high, thin voice bade him enter and as he did so, closing the door noiselessly behind him Phil started to speak, but George held up a warning finger. Utter silence reigned, however, and after a long minute Rex strolled over to the window and stood gazing down upon the double line of motors crawling along the Avenue. All at once he uttered an exclamation of surprise and his hands flew to the sash, only to fall again to his sides, and he turned with a baffled expression to George, who was regarding him quizzically.

"What the—" he began, but got no further, for Robert reappeared and taking their hats and sticks ushered them into the room from which he had just emerged. It was large and lofty-ceilinged, with windows facing on both the avenue and side street, and through an archway in the

third wall could be seen another fireplace flanked by tall bookcases. Huge davenports and deep-cushioned leather chairs stood about at comfortable angles to the many side brackets of modern electric fixtures which were placed at regular intervals in the walls, every other available space of which was covered with arrangements of keen-bladed weapons of every country and period grouped with no regard to their kind or age. Broadswords hobnobbed with African spears, slender Italian rapiers with short, ugly-looking dirks and over a desk in the corner a scimitar was crossed with a machete.

A little old man, weazened and shrunken but dapper almost to the point of effeminacy had risen from before the desk and now stood glancing in quick appraisal from one to the other of them through gold-rimmed pince-nez, from which a long loop of black ribbon was suspended. His gaze passed over Phil and George and rested unerringly upon Rex Powell.

"You are the head of the firm known as the 'Shadows'?" His voice was reedy and piping. "Robert did not grasp your name, but he is needlessly upset."

"My name is Powell, Mr. Sneed, and although I am nominally the president of our organization our various cases are taken in hand by those of our experts whose training has best fitted them for the investigation of each particular problem. We are practically an association of specialists," Rex replied. "This is Mr. Roper and Mr. Howe."

Sneed nodded and motioned with one claw-like hand to chairs.

"I am glad that you were at liberty to come to me at once, gentlemen," he said. "I trust, though, that Robert has not made a great to-do about what after all will probably prove a very simple matter. I own that I myself was agitated when I first opened the letter this morning—Robert has told you that it is because of an anonymous letter that I sent for you?"

"Yes, Mr. Sneed. Our handwriting expert will follow us here shortly." Rex drew his chair closer. "Before we undertake this case let me remind you of the promise we made to our prospective clients in our announcements, one of which was sent to you, of absolute secrecy and discretion now and in the future. In return for this, however, we must have the unreserved confidence of our clients. They must be candid with us and withhold no fact or even suspicion that might aid us in the investigation, for we cannot work in the dark."

"That is quite understood!" A dry cackle broke from the lips of their new client. "You call yourselves specialists, gentlemen; if I were ill enough to require the services of a medical specialist would I not defeat my own ends and practically throw his fee in the street if I were to withhold from him the true symptoms of my case? I am placing myself unreservedly in your hands."

"Then, Mr. Sneed, will you tell us whether you have the slightest inkling or not as to who might be the author of the letter?"

"I have not, sir." The old gentleman drew himself up with an air of dignity. "It seems like the mere rambling denunciation of a lunatic and if I had not feared that it would be but the fore-runner of further annoyance and perhaps an attempt at personal violence I would have destroyed it and thought no more about it. I am at a loss as to why it was addressed to me for its contents are wholly unintelligible, but because of another incident of the past few days I decided to place myself under the protection of someone more discreet than the average police detective, and more intelligent. My safe, which I thought impregnable, has recently been tampered with. It is not that which gives me so much concern, for the attempt was unsuccessful, of course, but the fact that an intruder could have invaded my privacy without detection is most disturbing. We all have our little idiosyncrasies, I suppose, and mine is the not unnatural one of desiring seclusion in my own home."

His lips had drawn to a thin line and his withered jaw set like a steel trap. George Roper hitched forward a little and spoke in his drawling sanctimonious tones.

"Most assuredly, my dear sir! But was there any reference made in the letter to the safe or the fact that someone had forced an entrance here? Have you any reason for connecting that incident with this anonymous threat other than your inability to account for either of them to your satisfaction?"

Sneed regarded him through narrowed eyes for a moment and then replied:

"There was no reference to the safe or to the intruder, but there was a vague, ridiculous accusation that I was unlawfully possessed of something which the writer claimed and a threat to take it away from me. The accusation is false, needless to say, but the creature who penned it should not be at large to persecute respectable citizens, much less break into their homes." Sneed rose. "I will get the letter now and you shall judge for yourselves.—I will bring the letter to you here."

He added the last pointedly for Phil had risen, too, with the expectation that he would be permitted to examine the safe, but their client's meaning was unmistakable and the discomfited mechanical expert sank back again as Sneed moved with a peculiar sidling gait to the archway leading into the library and the heavy portieres fell together behind him. Phil turned to Rex, but George forestalled him.

"It is singular that Mr. Sneed should have been selected at random for the attack of a crazed brain." He spoke obviously for the benefit of the man in the next room. "It may be that he chose the name from the register and there will be a flood of anonymous letters sent to patrons of the hotel."

"The fact that the safe was tampered with puts a different complexion on the affair, though." Rex followed his lead. "If there is really any connection between the two, the safe will be the starting point of our investigation, since the attempt upon it was made before this letter came."

Phil held up his hand suddenly and rising, tiptoed over to the curtain at the side of the archway and peered cau-

tiously within just as there came a sharp click followed by a subdued whirring and a thud. To the uninitiated the sound was not unlike that of a crane hoisting and depositing some soft but heavy object, and Phil's face was a study as he returned to his chair, evading the inquiring gaze of the others.

A metallic clang and the rustle of paper came to their ears and then Sneed reappeared holding an envelope gingerly between thumb and forefinger as though its very touch were contaminating. Drawing from it the two sheets of paper which it contained he held them out to Rex.

"Phineas Sneed," the latter read aloud. "'The dead sometimes return. You thought you had beaten me when you robbed me of my greatest treasure and had me sent to a living death, but I have come back and lies and treachery will not save you now if you try to stand in my path. You are dealing with one who knows you and your devilish schemes and who will stop at nothing for revenge. For every hour spent in that hell you shall suffer! If harm has come to that which you stole from me you shall pay! Old man, take warning, for I shall come to claim my own!'"

The silence which followed as Rex handed the letter to his companions was broken by Sneed himself. He had not resumed his seat, but stood by the desk plucking impatiently at his pendulous under lip.

"Well?" he demanded. "What do you think of it? The creature is unbalanced, of course, but that is where any possible danger could lie. If he has got some crazed no-

tion that I have something in my safe that rightfully belongs to him, and with the cunning of the insane has managed to gain access to my apartments I shall not feel at ease until he is safe under lock and key."

"Are you quite sure that you can recall no one who might have such a fancied grievance against you, Mr. Sneed?" George folded the two sheets together and laid them upon the table. "In the financial world in which you were a prominent figure not many years ago a man cannot climb very high without making enemies, however unconscious he may be of them. Have you thought well since that letter came this morning?"

"It is a tissue of lies, sir!" Sneed's face was convulsed with sudden rage and he brought his fist down sharply upon the desk. "That lunatic not only accused me of robbery but of being responsible for sending him somewhere, for which he threatens vengeance. There is nothing in my safe nor in my possession that is not lawfully mine, but the writer of that letter, whatever kink he has in his brain, may have conceived some cunning plan to rob me, or be the tool of others."

"In that case, Mr. Sneed, before we can proceed further it will be absolutely necessary for our expert here, Mr. Howe, to examine your safe and to know the exact circumstances under which you discovered that it had been tampered with," Rex said firmly, but their client shook his head.

"Not at all! I have told you that the attempt made was unsuccessful; it was bound to be! No one can open the

safe for there is not another like it in the world. It was constructed especially for me after an idea of my own and no one could enter it who did not know the secret. I do not propose that anyone shall!—It is not a matter of distrust, gentlemen!” he added hastily as he noted the quick flash in Rex’s eyes. “The mechanism which controls my safe has nothing to do with the letter upon which I have consulted you. Find the man who wrote it and see that he is put away; that is all I require of you and I am willing to pay—”

“You cannot pay for our professional reputations which are at stake if we fail in a case, Mr. Sneed, and we cannot undertake yours, as I warned you, if you do not give us your full confidence,” Rex retorted. “We must be the best judges of what is or is not pertinent to our investigation. You say that the safe was your own invention and especially constructed for you. The men who built it, therefore, must know the secret of its mechanism and it is possible that they have adapted your idea and made others like it. Have you thought of that?”

Once more a dry cackle broke from Sneed’s lips.

“It was a matter not so much of construction as of installation, and I am quite certain that no other was built like it for the man whom I employed died soon afterward and I had made it to his interest to keep the details of my invention to himself. The intruder who broke in here may have learned of its location, but he could not gain access to it.”

“When was the attempt made to break into it, Mr.

Sneed?" George interposed quickly before Rex could speak again.

"Sometime between last Saturday morning when I took some papers from it to my vault at the bank just before the closing hour and the following afternoon," Sneed replied. "I went to it then to compare some accounts with those I had in my desk and I discovered unmistakable indications that an attempt had been made to open it. That is immaterial, however, except as it may have some bearing on this letter—"

The harsh whirr of a buzzer interrupted him and he crossed to the door by which they had entered and opened it an inch or two, just sufficiently to reveal Robert's face in the aperture. As the latter addressed his employer in an undertone Phil turned in appeal to Rex.

"For the love of Mike, old man, let me get a flash at that safe!" he implored. "Don't take this bird's word for it that the case depends only on that letter!"

"I am not," Rex responded. "Don't worry, Phil, your turn will come, for we will see that safe or drop the case."

"What is your handwriting expert's name?" asked Sneed from the doorway.

"Mr. Nichols. Has he come? We left word for him—"

"Show Mr. Nichols in, Robert." Sneed left the door ajar and returning to the table he took up the letter. "Now perhaps we shall make some real progress."

Phil flushed and even George frowned, but Rex sat seemingly unmoved and only those who knew him well would have detected the slight hardening of his jaw or

sensed the unalterable determination which it portended. His tone was still suave when he presented Cliff Nichols on the latter's appearance, but he added :

"It has not been settled yet that we will accept this case. Mr. Sneed agreed to place himself unreservedly in our hands, but we differ as to the relevancy of a certain detail. If we may not examine the safe we had best not take up any more of his valuable time nor our own."

He rose, but Sneed put out a nervously clutching hand.

"I am perfectly willing to show you how the attempt was made to tamper with it!" he exclaimed. "I am naturally jealous of my invention and do not wish it disclosed to the world, but I had decided to trust you before I dispatched Robert with my message. If you insist your expert is, of course, welcome to examine the safe, but I prefer first to hear what this gentleman has to say about the letter."

He extended it to Nichols as he spoke and the latter after a glance at their leader accepted it and read it with a casual air.

"Quite so." Cliff reached out for the envelope and slipping the letter into it he placed it in his pocket. "There is nothing extraordinary about this, my dear Mr. Sneed; it is quite in the usual run of anonymous letters sent by cranks to prominent men who may or may not have incurred their personal enmity. With your permission I will examine this more fully at my office. From the information I found awaiting me there I understand that it came in the ordinary mail this morning and your butler

according to custom laid it beside your plate."

"Yes, but—but have you nothing to tell me about the sender of it?" Disappointment made the old man's thin tones shrill. "What does the handwriting indicate? Surely if you are an expert in this—er—branch of your profession you must have gained some facts from just a first reading!"

"I have nothing to tell you now, Mr. Sneed." Cliff smiled but his mild, near-sighted eyes snapped at the half-incredulous sneer. "At this stage of our investigation we ask questions, we do not reply to them before we have sufficient data and time to study and reflect upon it. This writing is disguised, of course, but is there not a letter nor a stroke of the pen which is familiar to you, however vaguely? Have you compared it with any specimens of other handwriting which you may have among your papers?"

"Certainly not! It never occurred to me to do so!" Sneed disclaimed vigorously. "That would imply that I had a suspicion as to the identity of the author and as I have repeatedly assured your associates here I am as much in the dark as they are. The contents of the letter is sheer nonsense to me, the raving of a creature of unsound mind, and the writing itself is like none other that I have ever seen to my knowledge."

"Yet you considered it of sufficient importance to call us in." Cliff spoke meditatively as though to himself and their client retorted hastily:

"It is of sufficient importance to me, sir, that my peace

of mind and perhaps my personal safety be not endangered by a crank! Then, too, my safe—!"

He paused biting his lips but George interposed.

"As Mr. Nichols can do nothing further until he has had an opportunity to study the letter privately I might suggest that you show us your safe now and then we will return to our headquarters."

Sneed glanced at each of the four unyielding faces and shrugged.

"Very well, but remember, gentlemen, that the safe is a mere detail, of minor importance. I should never have gone to the trouble of consulting you about it. I require your services only in regard to the letter and the sender of it!"

There seemed to be almost a note of warning in his tones and George glanced meaningly at their leader as they followed the old man to the curtained doorway, but Rex was watching Phil. Since the glimpse which the former safe-cracker had taken through those curtains when their client went to procure the letter an unusual preoccupation had settled upon him and over his weak, goodlooking features an expression of amazement mingled with incredulity had spread.

Now as he halted in the doorway only Rex was close enough to catch the involuntary exclamation which escaped him.

"Good Lord! The Super-swing!"

CHAPTER III

PHINEAS SNEED'S INVENTION

THE library was a square room almost as large as the one they had just left, with two windows opening on the side street and a third deep and high up in the opposite wall, which evidently gave upon the inner court. The lines of bookcases that reached from floor to ceiling on all sides was broken otherwise only by the fireplace and beside it at an angle across the corner of the room, a safe.

It was of medium size and solid-looking, differing in no wise at a casual glance from those ordinarily seen in offices, and its half-opened door disclosed a double row of small drawers and pigeonholes stacked with an orderly array of papers. Ledgers and account books filled the lower space and the bulk of a black japanned tin despatch box could be discerned in its innermost recesses.

Yet to the trained perceptions of Rex Powell there seemed to be something odd about the position of the safe. It jutted out into the room taking up more space than its dimensions appeared to warrant and the panelling in the angle where the two sides of the wall met to form the corner just above and behind it showed a faint tracery of cracks in the dull varnish. Looking closer he noted that upon each side of the safe there were short, claw-like pro-

jections of steel from which stout rods ran back seemingly into the wood, and Sneed's unguarded admission that his invention pertained more to the method by which the safe had been installed than to that receptacle itself returned to his mind.

George and Cliff Nichols stood regarding it critically while Phil with a mere glance at its contents ran his hands down the rods at either side, gazed up at the wall and then with a nod as of satisfaction abruptly turned his back upon it and began a slow circuit of the room. Sneed, who had taken his stand on the hearth with a supercilious smile uttered a low exclamation and plucked nervously at the wrinkled skin about his sharp jaw, his small shrewd eyes following every measured step of the mechanical expert, but he said no word until the latter turned.

"Mr. Sneed, the installation of this safe was your own idea, you say? What suggested it to you in the first place? I know, of course, that it slides back into the wall at the touch of a concealed spring, but that is not alone its unusual feature. You have made a study of hydraulics?"

"Only a superficial one," Sneed replied with elaborate carelessness. "A movable wall safe is not unique and one which I had seen suggested this to my mind. I drew a rough plan without practically any working knowledge of how it could be constructed and informed myself upon it later. The man I employed found no difficulty in following my instructions."

"How long ago was it installed?"

"A little over four years, nearer five to be exact, but I cannot see what bearing that may have—?"

"And who constructed it for you?" Phil persisted. "What firm supplied the man?"

"None," Sneed replied shortly. "He was a foreigner, a skilled mechanic, as you may have judged for yourself, but without ideas of his own. He was sick and out of work when I ran across him and gave him this commission. Naturally I would not take my unpatented invention to any established manufacturers and permit them thereafter to turn out replicas by the wholesale!"

He shrugged again impatiently and moved toward the windows as though he considered the interrogation a superfluous bore, but Phil went on doggedly:

"How did you happen to run across this foeigner? What was his name and what country did he come from?"

"Really this is irrelevant!" The other's asperity was uncontrolled. "The fellow performed his work to my satisfaction and the price I paid him enabled him to return to his home in France before he died. His name was Jules—Jules Dumois or Dupuy or something like that; I have forgotten, and it is immaterial! I know that he is dead and I am convinced he told no one of this method of installation."

"You kept track of him, though, Mr. Sneed, didn't you? You must have, to be so sure of his death."

"His widow wrote begging me to pay the funeral expenses; that is how I know, but the man was practically dying, anyway, when he left this country. I tell you this is a sheer waste of time!" Sneed turned in exasperation to

Rex. "If you people are trying to make a complicated affair out of this you are mistaken! The crank who wrote that letter is the one I want found and put away and he may have had nothing to do with the attempt upon my safe last week!"

"Yet that such an attempt was made, and that the letter virtually accuses you of unlawful possession of some 'treasure' of evident value to the writer are two rather significant points, you will admit," Rex replied as patiently as he could. "Will you tell us of your movements from Saturday noon until you discovered on the following day that the safe had been tampered with?"

"I went to my deposit vault at the bank just before noon with the papers which I told you I had taken from the safe." Sneed had sidled back to his former position on the hearth and his irascible temper seemed to have subsided. "I had shut it carefully and tested it, as I invariably do more from habit than anything else, for of late I have kept nothing here of value to anyone but myself. I lunched downtown and went to a curio shop or two which I frequently visit, then returned to dine at home. I retired early as usual without another thought to the safe and nothing disturbed me or my servants during the night. Sunday I motored out of town to look at some property and it was late afternoon when I returned. I began to figure up some accounts and it was then on going to my safe that I found someone had tried to break into it, as I will explain to you, gentlemen!"

From the beginning of his speech when he had again

stationed himself with his back to the fireplace Sneed had apparently made no gesture or movement, yet now there came to the ears of the four Shadowers the same subdued whirring sound that they had heard before and a section of the walnut panelling which met in the corner receded a few inches and then rose smoothly behind the upper part as the safe at the same time rolled back into the aperture thus formed. There was a sharp click and the sliding section descended noiselessly once more, fitting with perfect exactitude into its place. Save for the minute cross cracks in the surface of the panels, which might easily have been laid to a defect in the grain of the wood, no outward indication was left of the recess in the wall and what it contained, and Sneed rubbed his shrivelled hands together and chuckled in almost childish pleasure.

“Rather neat, eh?”

“It’s one of the slickest—!” George Roper had momentarily forgotten his present status and his slaty gray eyes lighted with enthusiasm. “For a spook cabinet it has everything else skinned—I mean that it is far superior to the crude mechanism employed by some fraudulent spiritualists whom we have had occasion to investigate lately! —But I do not see any marks except those barely discernible fissures where the panels join the upper wall.”

“There are none, but anyone having known or guessed that a safe was concealed here would naturally have sought for a sliding panel and the spring or lock that controlled it, realizing that mere force would not cause it to open. The first thing that I noticed last Sunday afternoon was

the blur of fingermarks with here and there the imprint of a whole moist palm where it had been pressed all up and down the panelling, showing as clearly on the satin finish of the wood as though it were a mirror." Sneed paused. "He must have suspected a system of leverage then and looked for the handle or pivot that would start it in motion, for this loose brick here in the hearth was pried out of place, several of the volumes in the book-cases on either side of the movable panels were disarranged and there were fingermarks again, dusty this time, all along the carving in the white marble of the mantel."

"I wish we had been called in before those finger prints disappeared," Cliff Nichols remarked. "Did you observe their general outline, Mr. Sneed? Was there any peculiarity about the shape of the palm which impressed you particularly?"

"Only that they were large and powerful looking—I noticed the print of both palms, and the fingers were thick and square at the ends, and rather curiously bent."

"Spatulate." Cliff nodded understandingly. "Those of the average safe-breaker are, unless he is an artist in his line."

He cast a guileless glance at Phil as though for corroboration and that young man grimaced and thrust both hands hastily in his pockets. George Roper's mellifluous tones broke the momentary pause.

"Remarkable presence of mind, my dear sir! You must have been greatly disturbed at the evidences of an intruder, yet you were sufficiently collected to note the im-

print of *both* palms! I would be too much to hope, I suppose, that one had left a plainer impression than the other?"

"It did not, Mr. Roper, but I understand what you imply." Sneed accepted the diplomatic tribute with patronizing modesty. "I observed, however, that where the dust marks of all five fingers appeared on the mantel those of the left hand were more numerous than those of the right."

"That is something to go upon, at any rate," remarked Rex. "The marks upon the woodwork would have disappeared by themselves a few hours after they were made and if one of your servants had dusted this room in the morning surely the imprint of dirty fingers on that white marble would have been noticed had they been made during the night. You questioned them, of course?"

Sneed shook his head slyly.

"Only as to their movements while I was out and whether or not they had heard anything during the night, and before doing so I myself removed all traces of those finger-prints. I keep only two servants, old Robert and his wife Jane, and although they have been with me for a number of years and I have always found them faithful I preferred to hear their story without disclosing how I knew that an intruder had entered my rooms. They could throw no light upon the affair, however. Both had been at home all of Saturday and on Sunday Jane had been out from ten o'clock until three, but Robert had remained at home. I myself returned shortly after four."

"Had you occasion to enter your library yourself before going out that morning?"

"No. I arose later than is my usual custom and the car was waiting while I breakfasted. I have told you all I can of the matter and it is in your hands now, gentlemen, but once more let me impress upon you that my sole object in sending for you was to protect myself from the writer of that letter. If he proves to be the same man who attempted burglary here, so much the better, but if not it is reasonable to suppose that my visitor will not trouble me again since his first effort was unprofitable."

Sneed moved toward the other room as though to signify that the protracted interview was at an, but Phil held doggedly at his heels.

"Just a minute, Mr. Sneed. From what you've told us there is nothing to show that the Frenchman you employed couldn't have welched on you before he died;—told the details of this invention of yours to somebody, or sold them. You haven't told us yet how you ran across him in the first place."

"I tell you the fellow is not a factor in this case!" The old man's irascible temper flared up once more and his small eyes flashed like twin points of steel. "I do not wish to discuss my invention any further! It was more a whim on my part than anything else; I wanted to see my idea take practical shape and form, but I had no definite plan to that end until this fellow came to me and I learned casually during our interview that he was a mechanical engineer. I sounded him and he was glad

to accept my terms and conditions. That is all there was to it."

"Why did he come to you? Did he hear that you were interested in mechanics?"

"No. Some curio dealer had told him that I was making a small collection of swords and other weapons and he had brought an old Moorish knife to sell to me.—But all this is totally beside the point! I want the writer of that letter!"

"We will do our utmost to find him for you," Rex assured him as they followed him back into the corner room once more. "By the way, your man tells me that your apartments occupy the entire upper floor of the hotel here and that they are built all around a square open roof-court in the center. What is back of the library? I saw no connecting door."

"There is none. All along the back are store-rooms and the servants' quarters, including my private kitchen where Jane prepares my especial diet whenever I have one of my attacks. At right angles to it, parallel with this side street are my own personal apartments; my bedroom, dressing-room, dining-room and study. The latter reaches to the Avenue on the other side of the reception room and completes the square.—I cannot see, however, that the arrangement of my apartment can have anything to do with the matter I have called you in to investigate. That letter came in the ordinary mail!"

He had spoken with nervous haste and his thin voice had taken on a rasping quality as though he found it diffi-

cult to breathe. A dull, angry spot of color had mounted, too, in his wrinkled cheeks and his fingers worked restlessly on the high chair-back on which he had leaned. The excitement of the morning and his own ungovernable temper seemed to have brought him to the verge of one of the attacks he had mentioned, and Rex ignored his expostulation and remarked:

"We will get to work on it at once, Mr. Sneed, and communicate with you as soon as we have made any progress. In the meantime, should we require further information one of us will call upon you."

"You will find me here." Sneed pressed the bell in the wall beside his desk. "I am not in the best of health and rarely go out except on business. I prefer that you come to me personally with what future questions you may wish to ask, for Robert is a garrulous old fool and Jane exaggerates, I find, like all women! The letter itself furnishes the only real data in the case and I have done all I can to assist you when I placed it in your hands.—Robert, show the gentlemen out."

He did not accompany them into the reception room and George, the last of the quartette to file out, glanced back to see him sink once more into his chair, his head with its scanty white hair bent forward in meditation and his fingers drumming upon the desk.

Robert closed the living-room door behind them and went for their hats and sticks and Cliff Nichols observed disgustedly:

"There may be some interesting points in connection

with this letter but as far as our new client is concerned I cannot say that I for one am entering upon this case with any undo amount of enthusiasm. Of all the boorish old reprobates—!"

George held up a warning hand.

"There is an old saying, my dear Cliff, that walls are sometimes provided with ears. I would suggest that we defer our discussion of this matter until we have—"

He paused for a door at the left of the fireplace opened and a woman started forward into the room. She was about fifty years old, broad of hip and shoulder, with heavy beetling brows and a dark line of down upon her upper lips. For a moment she gazed at them with a surly air, then her sharp eyes fell and with a muttered word of apology she crossed to the door on the other side of which Sneed sat and entered without knocking, closing it behind her with a definite slam.

"Whew! If that is Jane, I don't wonder Robert wore a henpecked air!" Rex shrugged and spoke in a careful undertone. "Were you serious about that ear, George?"

George Roper's lank countenance remained immobile and no movement of his lips was perceptible, but his unmistakable voice replied laconically:

"Electric light button beside door is dummy. Look close!" He turned with sudden urbanity as Robert reappeared. "You and your wife must take excellent care of these rooms. We were just observing that they do not look as though it were all of ten years since they were done over."

"It isn't, sir." The butler's face lighted with a pleased smile at the praise. "Mr. Sneed lived in an apartment on one of the lower floors until five years ago when he took this and remodelled it as I told you before, sir. I—I hope you'll be able to help him."

He added the last in a half-whisper with a deprecatory glance toward the connecting door and handed them their hats and sticks in ill-concealed haste. Then he escorted them out into the entrance hall and down the stairway to the private door, which he unlocked for them.

No word passed between the four Shadowers after taking leave of him until they had descended in the elevator and crossed the echoing lobby to the street. Phil Howe, ordinarily the most garrulous member of the organization, had not spoken since they left the presence of Sneed and now he pushed his Panama a trifle back upon his curly head and whistled softly as he strode along.

"Why so pensive?" George demanded. "Our client is a rum old bird, I'll admit, but why in time you pestered him so about the man who built his safe for him and then neglected to find out the most important thing of all is beyond me. You took the cross examination into your own hands and I only interfered when it was necessary to pour oil on the troubled waters, otherwise I should have demanded myself that he show us how he worked the mechanism of that invention of his."

"Oh, that?" Phil asked airily. "He wouldn't have shown you if his life had depended on it, and anyway it doesn't

matter. I saw how he worked it, or rather I guessed when I rubbed at him through the curtains."

"Sneed is right, though; this letter is the key to the main problem." Cliff patted his pocket complacently. "I saw nothing so very remarkable about that contrivance. The mechanical devices which Rex had rigged up in our offices are far more amazing to me."

"No. I fancy that safe works on a different and unique system," Rex said thoughtfully. "One thing is sure. There is more mystery connected with Mr. Phineas Sneed that he does not wish delved into than that which he has called upon us to solve."



CHAPTER IV

'O-FOUR-TWO-SIX'

“**S**UPPOSE we take the letter into consideration first, for after all as Cliff says, it is the main key to the problem,” Rex suggested. They were seated once more about the council table in his private office and to Lucian Baynes and Henry Corliss, who had joined them, had been recounted the gist of their conversation with their new client. “We can compare notes afterward as to any curious facts which may or may not have come under our individual notice and then decide which of us is to assume charge of the case.”

“That goes without saying, doesn’t it?” Henry glanced at Cliff as the latter produced the letter, and taking it from the envelope he spread it on the table before them. “Hope I’ll get a look in as alienist when Cliff finds the nut who wrote that letter. Read it to us, old man.”

Cliff complied and then observed:

“I’d like to know what you all think of it before I express an opinion. I want to see if one peculiarity about it strikes you as forcibly as it does me.”

George Roper shook his head.

“I’ve worked every graft and played every con. game going in my time and I flatter myself that I’ve learned to

be a pretty fair judge of human nature. Off-hand, I wouldn't say that the fellow who wrote that was altogether a nut. It is worded in a hifalutin style, but people are sometimes unconsciously dramatic when they are laboring under strong emotion, and there's another way to look at it, too. What if he had wanted to make it read like the work of a crank in case it fell into other hands than Sneed's, but was convinced that the old man himself would know very well what it meant and who had sent it? I'm confounded if it don't ring true to me, as though the writer were sincere, however he might have been mistaken in bringing his accusations and threats against Sneed."

"Did the old man smoke while you were there?" Henry asked as he took up the letter and sniffed it audibly.

"No. There wasn't the slightest odor of tobacco in his rooms," Rex replied quickly.

"Then our letter-writing friend must have a varied and inconsistent taste," the chemical expert declared as he passed the letter to Lucian. "You're rather a connoisseur, Luce. You can't escape that smell of rank Virginia tobacco; it is stronger on the envelope than on the sheets of paper, but the whole thing is permeated by another blend, too. It's something more delicate and yet quite as penetrating. Do you get it?"

"My olfactory sense may not be as well developed as yours, but I certainly do get it, Henry!" Luce made a wry face as he dropped the envelope and held the inner sheets gingerly to his nose. "Yes, by Jove, it is the pur-

est Russian and of a grade that I thought couldn't be obtained nowadays! The chap probably kept a box or two of rare cigarettes in the same drawer with this writing paper, but by preference smoked that other unspeakable stuff.—Hello!"

His eyes had fallen upon the handwriting and he read the letter carefully twice through to himself while the others watched him. At length he glanced across the table at Cliff.

"Here is another inconsistency. I wonder if this is what you meant, my dear fellow? The bottom of the page ends with the sentence: 'For every hour spent in that hell you shall suffer,' and the word 'suffer' is repeated at the top of the next page. That is one of the fundamental rules of our English cousins in commercial correspondence and is as essentially national a touch as is the peculiar formation of some of the letters, particularly the 'e', yet the phraseology is distinctly American. I should say that the writer was an Englishman, educated over there but long enough in this country for our form of speech to have become second nature to him. Was it that to which you referred?"

Cliff smiled.

"You and Henry have both approached it and by clues which I hadn't discovered, but your final conclusion is wrong, I think," he replied. "There isn't necessarily any inconsistency between the phraseology and the form of writing, or the two widely different kinds of tobacco.—"

George, would you say that the letter was composed by some whining old dotard?"

"Hardly!" George chuckled drily. "All the sentences are clipped short except the second one, in which the thought of his real or fancied wrongs ran away with him. He may have stuck in a phrase or two at the end to make it appear to others than Sneed like the work of a crank, but the letter as a whole wasn't studied and I should say it had been written on the spur of the moment by some strong-willed fellow in a violent passion."

"Exactly!" Cliff crowed exultantly. "I admit that I am still a good deal of a tyro at deducing personality from handwriting, but unless all the signs in those books on the subject which Rex got for me are wrong these words were written by an elderly man to whom penmanship was rather a task."

"And you claim there is no inconsistency—?" Henry was beginning, but Rex cried:

"I see, Cliff! You mean that letter is the work of two people, an elderly man who wrote at the dictation of a younger, stronger one!"

"That would account for the tobacco, of course," Henry agreed. "Say that the young fellow smoked the Russian cigarettes and the old man the common domestic variety."

"I wonder that didn't occur to any of us but Cliff!" exclaimed Luce. "The writer was English and the other American. It is just a supposition but if we assume that some young man of Sneed's own social position keeps an English valet and prevailed upon him to write that letter

we will have a working basis even though it is a trifle too much to take for granted."

"No. That was my idea. Do you see how the pen fairly plows through the paper on the upward strokes and how wavering and uncertain it is on the downward ones?" Cliff pointed to a line here and there as he spoke. "That is not the free hand of one lately accustomed to much clerical work and yet the formation of the characters is typical of the old-fashioned London clerk, as Luce says. Following the theory he just brought forward, let us say that this valet has formerly occupied a superior position but had fallen in some way upon evil days.—Don't smile, George!"

"Oh, I'll grant you that an Englishman wrote that, elderly if you like and a former clerk, but why the valet? You'll be saying next that he wrote it under compulsion!"

"Something very like it!" Cliff retorted. "He wasn't exactly forced to do it for the writing doesn't indicate fear, but it does show hesitation and reluctance and a certain amount of emotion. Manservant or not, I think he was influenced by the younger, stronger character and persuaded against his better judgment."

"Well, we are agreed on one point, at least," observed Rex. "Two had a hand in this affair, one dictating and one writing. Henry has told us their taste in smoking tobacco and Luce deduced their respective nationalities, while from the phrasing of the letter George claims that the American is young, strong, impetuous and of violent passions, and from the chirography Cliff has found that

the Englishman is elderly, emotional and of weaker will. So far so good, but we haven't heard a word from you, Phil. What is on your mind?"

Phil roused himself with an effort from his own train of thought.

"Oh, I heard what you fellows have been saying, all right, and I know from the last case we handled that it isn't bunk, by a long shot, but when it comes to a guessing game like that you'll have to count me out! I couldn't tell from that letter whether one guy or ten had a hand in writing it and if you had their photographs in front of you where would you go from here?"

"Gad, but you are a pessimist—!" Cliff was beginning but Rex interrupted him.

"Nevertheless, we've all had the floor and it is Phil's turn. I have been observing this unusual concentration of his and I think he has a suggestion to make. Out with it, Phil!"

"No, it's just a request." The younger man leaned forward earnestly across the table. "Whichever of you fellows take charge of this case, for the love of Heaven let me work on it in my own way until I have satisfied myself about something. It is a point no one could handle but me, and I don't even see any definite connection between it and that letter as yet, but it couldn't be just coincidence! Unless I'm away off, old Sneed is the biggest liar and fraud in creation and he has made an enemy who, as that guy says, would 'stoop at nothing' to get

back at him. And Sneed knows it, too! You can laugh, but I tell you that old boy is in fear of his life!"

"Oh, come, Phil, that is a bit too much!" Luce drawled. "He wouldn't have come to a practically unknown organization like ours if the affair were as drastic as that. Granted that he wants to avoid notoriety, any man would chance it by going to the authorities for protection rather than be murdered in his bed!"

"Not if it would put him deeper in Dutch himself than the guy would be who is after him!" Phil objected. "Mind you, this is only a wild guess on my part and if it should turn out to be right that enemy of his may have misjudged him, but you haven't seen that apartment of his, Luce. Rex can tell you that it is protected like a fort!"

Rex nodded.

"There were several unique features about it. George got a few of them but I wondered if you and Cliff did, Phil."

"I'm not blind, or deaf, either!" the expert on safes retorted. "I might as well have been, though, for any word that could be heard from one room to another of that apartment and for a very good reason; the walls were padded! Did you notice how thick they were? When we were talking to Sneed and Cliff came, Robert sounded a buzzer in the livingroom to announce him, but the old man didn't call out 'come in,' for he knew his voice wouldn't be heard with the door closed; he crossed over and opened it, and he was careful to find out that Cliff was really our handwriting expert before he ordered the but-

ler to admit him. He told us about the attempt to rob him but he wouldn't let us see the safe until Rex threatened that if he didn't we would throw up the case."

"I discovered, too, that the walls were padded when I looked out of the reception room window at the stream of traffic on the Avenue and realized that not a sound rose from it. I tried then to open the window but it couldn't be done; the sash was sealed tight," Rex remarked. "George discovered later that there was a dictaphone concealed in the wall of that room, behind a fake electric light button."

"I found out something else that may have escaped you fellows, before we entered the apartment itself." George chuckled reminiscently. "Lord, how it took me back to the good old poolroom days! When Robert showed us up to that private entrance hall and stopped to unlock the door he sounded the knocker twice. It couldn't be heard within, of course, with the walls padded, but I think it had some electrical connection that announced our coming for Robert purposely fussed a lot with that key before he got the door unlocked and in the meantime I saw a perfectly good peephole open in the carving on one of the panels and an eye appeared, the woman's, I think. Rex was too much interested in that little window high up in the wall and what it looked out on to notice—!"

"It didn't 'look out on' anything, if you remember," Rex interjected. "That and the one in the library which opened on the roof court—if Robert is to be believed,—were for purposes of ventilation and light only. If the

old chap kept a harem the zenana couldn't be more carefully secluded! Robert got nervous, too, when I asked him about that first window; his hand trembled so that he could scarcely unlock the door, and Sneed wasn't any too pleased later when he learned that Robert had explained to us the way in which the apartment was laid out. He as much as ordered us not to question his servants any more.—By the way, Phil, did you ever in your late profession come across a safe that was installed like his?"

Phil shook his head.

"No." He spoke with an odd repression. "I've heard, though, that a similar mechanical contrivance was possible, but put to a far different use.—Don't ask me any more now, you fellows! Let me work in my own way and you can go as far as you like with that letter—!"

His speech ended in a gulp and he sat staring with protruding eyes at the envelope of the anonymous letter which he had picked up idly as he talked and was turning over and over in his hands. They clenched now until the stiff paper crumpled between them and suddenly he sprang to his feet.

"I've got it! It wasn't a coincidence after all!—Look here, I told you fellows a minute ago that I didn't see any definite connection between the letter and the point I wanted to investigate, but I see it now! I've got the proof! Sneed's enemy didn't write that, if Cliff guessed right about his age and character, and he couldn't have dictated it, not in that language, but the warning comes

from him all right, or somebody who has taken up the grudge for him!" Phil hesitated, his eager face flushing, and then he burst out: "Gee, I know this sounds like awful nerve when you all think I am just a roughneck yegg, good enough perhaps to crack a crib but not there with the headwork,—will you give me a chance to boss this job? Luce got the dope on the last case from a lump of dried mud, because he was the only one who knew where it came from and what it was used for; now I am the only one of us who stands a show of finding the guy for whom that letter was written, and I could use nearly all of you and save time right from the start! Will you give me my chance?"

"What do you say?" Rex asked slowly as he looked around the table. "Phil knows we don't think he is a roughneck, he is just as expert in his line as any of us are in ours."

"More expert than I am in mine," Cliff said generously. "I don't want the leadership in this case but I would hate to give up working on this letter now—"

"I wouldn't want you to!" Phil cried. "If you would stick to it and tell me every hint you can dope out of it I wouldn't ask any more of you!"

"You all took my word for it in the last affair when I told you I was the only one who could handle it, and you were willing to follow my directions blindly," Luce reminded them. "Phil even went away out of his line to get some information, and he did as much if not more than any of us. Now if he can tell us what connection

there is between the attempted robbery and the anonymous letter, and what made him so sure all of a sudden that such a connection existed I am ready and willing to take my instructions from him."

"And I." George nodded. "I am beginning to understand now, Phil, why you were so insistent about finding out who built that safe and what had become of him. You had heard of Sneed's invention before, hadn't you? The letter speaks of the dead returning; maybe you have reason to suspect that this 'Jules Dumois' or 'Dupuy' is a pretty lively corpse!"

"Henry?" Rex turned to the rotund medical expert inquiringly, and the latter shrugged.

"Oh, let Phil take the ship, by all means! He thinks he knows what he is getting at, anyway and as he says, where do we go from here if we depend solely on what can be deduced from the letter? It won't give us the names and address of the two men who concocted it, and from what you have told me Sneed isn't likely to give you any more information than he can help for fear of giving his own hand away. We can't go through the city with a fine-toothed comb looking for a young American with an elderly English pal, or advertise for them, and if Phil can locate them by going at the case from another angle, let him tackle it."

"But are you sure that you can?" Rex turned doubtful eyes on their colleague. "You said that you had absolute proof—?"

"I have." The careless, happy-go-lucky note was gone

from Phil's voice and he spoke with grave seriousness. "I am not going to tell you why, or how I came to know about it, but there is a certain—well, call it a code number, that came into my mind the minute I caught a glimpse of the mechanism which controlled that safe of Sneed's. Whether he has ever heard that number or not I don't know, but somebody evidently thinks that he has, and the letter must have been too vague to suit them. They wanted to make sure he would know who was on his trail and that it wasn't any bluff, so before the letter was mailed they jotted this little reminder down in the corner. It is so faint that you can hardly see it and I only noticed it myself a few minutes ago. Sneed was probably too upset to get it and it might not mean anything to him if he did, but I—I know the code!"

He smoothed the envelope flat upon the table and pointed to one corner. There, so lightly pencilled as to be barely discernible appeared the number: '0426'.

"It is agreed, then," Rex said after a pause. "Phil, the case is yours!"

CHAPTER V

THE MAN ACROSS THE HALL

“IT’S mighty fine of you boys to give me this chance!” Phil looked with sparkling eyes about the table at his fellow Shadowers. “I needn’t tell you that I will do my level best to make good and prove that you didn’t pick a bloomer when you trusted me to run this investigation. Of course, I don’t know how much of a hand I’ll be at telling other guys what to do for I worked alone in the old days from the time that I turned my first trick, but if you will all just work with me and advise me when I get in a hole I am sure we can’t fail!”

“We won’t!” George asserted confidently. “I don’t suppose you have thought out yet any special work for each of us to do?”

“You’re just the fellow for one lead I want followed up,” Phil replied. “You were once in the show business, weren’t you?”

“‘Show business?’” George repeated in surprise. “I ran a shell game with a circus in my early days, and worked the carnival circuits with every fake device for enticing kale from the pockets of hayseeds that was invented at that time. But why—?”

“Coney Island closes for the season at the end of the month, but there are bound to be some busted concessions

down there that would be glad to sublease right now and get out from under," Phil remarked. "You ought to be able to pick up a fortune-telling booth or something of that sort for a song. I wish you would, and get in with as many of the show people in the amusement parks as you can. I want to get a line on a woman known as 'Jen' who used to be in the carnival business,—slack wire stuff was her specialty, I think. She had a husband called 'Cap' who worked the same circuit with her but I don't remember what his graft was if I ever heard. Try to get track of them, will you?"

George's ministerial features lighted with a smile.

"My son, you have given me a stunt after my own heart!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "I don't think I have lost any of the old patter, and the sound of the barker's spiel will be music to my ears again! When do I start?"

"Go down this afternoon and look the ground over; mix with the bunch and locate a concession as soon as you can. When you're fixed let us know where and what kind of stunt you are pulling, and if you do get on the trail of the woman and her husband 'phone Ethel right away."

"'Cap' and 'Jen'," George ruminated. "Are those the only names you know them by? What do they look like?"

"I don't know them; never saw them in my life, as a matter of fact, I've only heard them spoken of." Phil seemed to be choosing his words with unusual care. "They

are a pretty decent, hardworking couple, I gathered, and the woman especially is the open-hearted kind who would take anybody in who was sick or in trouble. That's all I can tell you about them, and I know it is mighty little dope to go on, but I don't want to pass up any chance, no matter how slim."

"If they're still in the game you needn't worry. People in that line of work whether it's circus, carnival or amusement park are all like one big family and I am almost sure to find someone who can put me on their track." George rose. "If I am going to do this thing in character I will just have time to climb into some clothes fit for the part and get down there and look about a little before the afternoon rush starts. Any further instructions?"

Phil glanced half-deprecatingly at Rex, but the latter shook his head smilingly.

"No, this is your show. I haven't any suggestions to offer, but on the contrary I am waiting to take my instructions from you, my dear fellow!"

"It seems like rotten cheek, when you brought us all together in this organization! You're the real leader." Phil flushed again. "If you don't feel like doing what—what I thought of asking you to do later, Rex, why don't mind giving me the office."

"No, I'm playing the game all the way through.—Going, George?"

"Yes. You will hear from me as soon as I have arranged to take up my new vocation. I'll wager I coin

money at it, too, so even if Sneed doesn't show the proper appreciation for our efforts in his behalf I at least will not be out of pocket! See you later."

"I wonder how he deduced that Sneed was a miser," Cliff remarked when the panel had closed behind the other's attenuated figure. "Of course, George had an opportunity to study him at first hand longer than I did this morning, but I would like to see a specimen of the old boy's handwriting."

"I meant to bring you one," Phil declared. "I think I have about got his number, but if you can dope out anything more from his hen-tracks I'll be mighty glad."

"Then I'll get to work on this letter at once." Cliff moved toward his own office. "I want to study it in connection with some of those reference books of mine and you'll find me here whenever you bring the other specimens."

With a nod to the rest he disappeared and Lucian Baynes stirred in his chair.

"When Henry told me who had sent his card to us in my absence, Rex, I took the liberty of looking in your files before your return and I found that you had listed Sneed as a collector of curios," he observed. "None of you who called on him have mentioned such a collection. Does it really exist?"

"Yes, of a kind, but I doubt whether it comes within your scope, Luce. The walls of his living-room are covered with weapons; not firearms, but swords and spears and knives. There is no attempt at arrangement and

from a casual glance I should not say that any of them were of especial value. I fancy he picked up here and there whatever struck his eye. Odd sort of taste for a feeble old man who seems to be anything but blood-thirsty, to say the least."

"It is just an example of atavism I suppose." Luce drawled with a shrug. "That arch-murderer Bennington had a hobby for hunting and classifying butterflies, if you remember, and Mrs. Neil who wrecked all those banks, put most of her money into a collection of embroidered church vestments.—I would like a peep into that living-room of Sneed's, but I don't suppose you have planned any course of action for me yet, Phil?"

"I have, though, and one that you ought to take to like a duck to water!" Phil chuckled. "For the time being you are not a member of the Shadows but a gentleman of leisure, travelling for your health. That English accent of yours will come in good if you can keep it up! Go to the Burlingame, engage a suite of rooms and get in solid with the management. You know what I mean, live quietly but tip everybody like a prince and scrape acquaintance with the proprietor if you can. I want to know all about those rooms of Sneed's being remodelled, what excuse he gave for leasing that whole top floor for himself alone and whatever you can find out about the installation of that safe. Do you get me?"

"I do!" The drawl was gone from Luce's tones. "I might even ingratiate myself with Sneed. I think I see a way—"

"You won't have a chance to meet him!" Phil stared. "What do you think he has shut himself up away from everybody for? I don't believe that even the proprietor has been in those rooms since they were fixed over and it would take a fire to smoke the old weasel out, but there's no harm in trying. Get a lot of baggage with fancy labels, think up a classy monaker and sail in with the moss-grown swells over there. Don't 'phone us from the hotel, of course, but keep in touch with us."

"I'm off!" Luce paused in the aperture leading to the outer office. "By the way, Henry's cheerful face isn't known at the Burlingame, either. Couldn't he call on me if you have any further instructions—?"

"Henry is going out of town for a day or so." Phil interrupted, adding as Luce turned to depart:—"This is a mighty personal question, Henry, and I wouldn't ask it if any of the rest of us could possibly get away with what I want done. Rex might swing it because he has never been sent up, but I need him here. In your days of fake medicine did you ever operate unsuccessfully in this state?"

Henry drew his plump form up with dignity.

"My son, I have been the guest of the government at Joilet and various other resorts of the Middle West, if that is what you are driving at, but I never extended my mission of healing to New York. The high-priced specialists had got in ahead of me here at my own game."

"Then you wouldn't be identified up at Sing Sing? There's a new Warden, anyway, and he has changed

most of the staff. Do you suppose you could be a welfare worker looking up the record of a former con. for the sake of some dying buddy of his whom you have reformed?"

"Why couldn't I be a relative?" Henry suggested. "I needn't be dying to want to know what has become of my unfortunate brother or son!"

"Because you don't know the name he was sent up under, much less his real one. This pal has lost track of him and only learned that he was serving a term up there about three years ago for burglary." Phil's tone had lowered and he did not meet the eyes of his two companions as he added: "The yeggs he trailed around with called him 'The Gull'."

"Do you happen to know what he looked like?" Henry worked his question delicately. "It might help if I knew his approximate age and a few other little details that his dying pal would naturally have disclosed in talking about him."

"He was young, under thirty," replied Phil slowly. "He had sandy hair and he would have been freckled, I guess, even in stir. There wasn't anything of the hardened crook about him, but he was a dreamy kind of a nut and easily led."

"What if he is there still and the Warden trots him out for me?" Henry rubbed his bald head uneasily. "I'm not much up on this welfare business and if he should swear that he never heard of this buddy he's supposed to have had the Warden might get leery.—Not that there is

anything out against me, and I admit it would be a novel experience to visit a pen. of my own free will, but I am not over anxious to bring myself to the personal attention of the authorities."

"The Gull isn't there now," Phil said briefly. "Your reformed second-story man heard that he had been pardoned, and mind, he never knew of any trick the Gull actually turned. He was just in with the wrong crowd and liked to talk as big as the rest of them. That's the line to take, see?"

"His pal may have reformed but he needn't have become a snitcher!" Henry remarked. "I'm going to get real fond of my protégé before I reach the Big House. What does he want to find the Gull for? Is he going to leave him some of his wealth? He must have done pretty well at his game before he turned over a new leaf or a smug reformer like me wouldn't take so much trouble to pander to his last wishes."

"Oh, he could just have liked the lad and wanted to see him once more. That's only a detail. The main thing is to bluff the Warden into showing you the records and to find out if you can what has become of the Gull."

Henry rose somewhat heavily to his feet.

"I am going out first and locate some mission, or whatever they call it, where these welfare birds hang out," he announced. "One or two of them came my way at Joliet but I didn't encourage them. Now I want to see them in their natural habitat and get the line of talk one of them would be likely to hand the Warden. I'll get up there

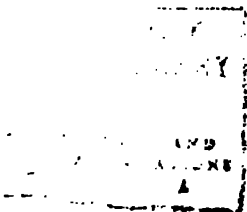
on the first train tomorrow morning and I ought to be able to pull off that interview and return by evening. You'll hear from me as soon as I get in."

"Henry is growing cynical I am afraid," Rex remarked when he and Phil were alone together. "It is evident that you know what you are doing, my boy, but I confess I don't quite follow you. Second-story workers and side-show people are queer fish to be in the same net with Sneed. We mustn't forget that he is our client and whatever mystery surrounds him is his own affair as far as we are officially concerned. Don't let your interest in the safe blind you to the main issue."

"I'm not!" exclaimed Phil. "I am only going at it in my own way to find out who wrote that letter. With Cliff working on it now and Luce as close to old Sneed as he can get, I knew I could spare Henry and George to follow up those old leads, but I want you to try something entirely different. We all know that you—well, you don't belong to us. Luce has a classy veneer, all right, and Cliff was a college man, but you've come from the real people and you've still got swell friends. I'd bet that you even know some of the society dames and financiers to whom you sent the Shadowers' announcements!"

Rex laughed.

"I was careful to choose people who wouldn't know or recognize me in case they required our professional services! But I don't want to use any of my old acquaintances if I can help it, Phil. I *do* belong to you of my



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own choice, and I've turned my back on them and their world."

He was still smiling, but there was a note of pain in his voice and the younger man flushed.

"I didn't mean to bring up anything I shouldn't, Rex, but it struck me that if you wanted to—to appear again in your old crowd you might be able to find out a little more about Sneed and the kind of life he must have led before he shut himself up like this. A man with all his money wouldn't have buried himself alive the way he has without some good reason and I want to find out what that reason is. I am dead certain it isn't only because of the enemy I told you about, it goes back further than that. I want to know everything I can learn about his life during the past—well, say ten years. Even if he didn't go in for society his wife may have done so when she was alive, and anyway among the men who butted up against him in the financial world there ought to be one or two who knew him more or less intimately. Do you understand?"

Rex nodded.

"I'll have to go after the old codgers, for if he has been out of the game for a decade or more the younger element won't recall him. The financial as well as the social world has a short memory, Phil. You won't expect to hear from me for a day or two?"

"No. Take your time; I may not show up here at the office again before you have all reported, but I'll com-



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municate with Ethel or whoever else happens to be in, of course. When can you get on the job?"

"At once." Rex took up his hat and stick. "I suppose it is no good to ask you what your own program is?"

"I'm not sure, myself!" Phil replied candidly, with a laugh. "It all depends on what I run into.—Good luck, Rex."

Yet when he was alone the smile faded from the young man's lips and an introspective look took its place as he rose and with hands thrust deep in his pockets paced rapidly to and fro. It would seem that his thoughts boded ill for someone, for his face darkened and now and then he muttered wrathfully to himself, but when at last he strode to the panel leading to the anteroom and slid it aside he called out in his usual cheerful tone:

"Hey, Ethel!"

The little secretary shifted her wad of gum.

"Anything doing?" she asked with interest. "When I got back from lunch Mr. Corliss told me he thought the ball had started rolling again, but when I asked Mr. Powell just now he said I should take my orders from you. I'll sure be glad to do something besides stall book-agents!"

"We have another little job on hand and I am supposed to be running it, but I don't know how it will pan out," Phil responded. "There is something you might be able to do, but I don't want to get you into any trouble or draw the attention of the bulls to our organization.

When you were caught with the goods that time they didn't take you downtown, did they?"

"Police headquarters, you mean?" The blonde head shook energetically. "No, and I'm not afraid they will now, no matter what you want me to pull off for you, Mr. Howe. Just give me the dope and you needn't worry about my dragging you people into the line-up!"

"You're quite certain no one down there would spot you?" Phil insisted somewhat uneasily. "You see that is what I want you to do, Ethel; pay a little visit to headquarters and make some inquiries for me. Think you could make yourself look homely and shabby and sickly?"

"I don't know about the sickly part but clothes'll make the difference in the rest," Ethel replied in matter-of-fact honesty, but she looked a trifle startled, nevertheless. "I wasn't mugged that time and I don't see how any of the dicks in Centre Street would know me, but what's the lay? I'm game for it, only I want a straight story if I'm going on the carpet before the main guys."

"You'll have to have more than that; you will need an address and not a phony one, either. Where are you living now?"

"With an old dame Mr. Powell found for me when he got me out of Lefty Jane's hands. She goes out sewing by the day—"

"What does she think you do?" Phil interrupted.

"Address envelopes, piece work for an advertising concern. Mr. Powell didn't want her to get wise that I was

working for him. We've got a dinky little flat down in the Chelsea district."

Phil grinned irrepressibly.

"Must be lively for you, Ethel! Rex will have you going to night school next!"

"And I'll tell the world I'd go if he wanted me to!" Ethel flushed. "If it hadn't been for him I would still be piking along working the shops instead of getting a chance at a swell game like yours, even if I'm not on yet to how you put it over, beyond the fact that we're all phony dicks! I'll take a tip from Mr. Powell whenever he hands one to me!—But what am I supposed to be when I show up at headquarters, and who am I trying to get a line on?"

"Your own name and address will be all right. You are a working girl out of a job and staying with an old friend. You'd better have come from some western city, though, in case you don't put your story over slick enough and they try to look you up. You've got an uncle named Jim Peterson whom you lost track of about six or seven years ago and just lately somebody told you he'd been doing time for smuggling dope, and only got out last Winter. Of course, you are sure he must have been innocent,—you know the old gag, Ethel,—and you would like to find him if they can help you, because he always said he would take care of you. Have you got that straight?"

"If I could think that fast and all new stuff I'd write a book, Mr. Howe!" she exclaimed admiringly. "Sure I've got it and I'll be Little Orphant Annie with bells on!"

"Don't pull it too strong!" Phil warned. "It's only a flier, you know. When you come back on the job here, all I want you to do is to stall an old gentleman named 'Sneed' if he calls up; tell him we are working on his case and will communicate with him later."

"So he is the fall guy now, is he?" Ethel laughed. "All right, Mr. Howe. You can depend on me.—Say, that man who moved into the office across the hall is kind of funny. You know, the one who breezed in this morning for a window pole?"

"How—'funny'?" Phil paused with his hand on the doorknob for there was a puzzled note in the girl's tones. "Have you seen him again?"

She nodded.

"I came up in the elevator with him when I got back from lunch and he bowed real pleasant; not a bit fresh. He kept looking at me and then away again quick as though he wanted to say something but couldn't make up his mind. I took my time about opening the door here and he didn't close his after letting himself in. I could sort of feel that he was looking at me. He sure isn't any dick but he seems mighty interested in us. Want me to kind of encourage him?"

"Not yet until we see what his game really is. Watch your step at headquarters, Ethel. Goodbye."

He had purposely treated as of no moment her information about their new neighbor, but he glanced curiously at the half-opened door of the other office as he passed, conscious of a quick step within. He had reached the

elevator when the door behind him closed and the same firm, springy tread followed down the hall just as the car descended. Phil took in the tall, bronzed, broadshouldered figure which Ethel had likened to that of a 'movie' Westerner' in one hasty but comprehensive look and then ostentatiously turned his back, although when the street level was reached he was careful to let the other precede him and noted the free, swinging stride with which he set off eastward.

Phil himself turned west, to the rather dubious tenement quarter near the river where he had rented a room from a former pal for professional purposes and where, truth to tell, he felt more at home than in the dignified bachelor apartment in which Rex had insisted that he install himself. There, as he donned a shabby pair of old trousers and a ravelled sweater all thought of the stranger was forgotten in his plans for the immediate future, but when he issued forth once more some sixth sense borne of the old days warned him of espionage.

In a doorway between two dingy shops across the way stood the broad-shouldered figure of his fellow passenger in the elevator and Phil slunk hastily past. He had plainly not been recognized in his present rough attire, but one fact was certain; as George Roper had hinted half in jest, the Shadows were being shadowed.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SOUND UNHEARD

THE demure young girl in the cheap, black gown and modest straw turban who timidly descended the wide, shallow stairway at police headquarters and ventured out once more into the sunshine was a shade more pale beneath the cleverly applied coating of powder than when she had entered half an hour before. In spite of her vaunted daring Ethel had felt none too easy in her mind at venturing into the very citadel of her natural antagonists and the unexpectedly searching inquiry to which she had been kindly but very firmly subjected by the inspector in charge had not tended to allay her inward nervousness.

Her mission would seem on the face of it to have been futile for there was apparently no record of the further proceedings of one Jim Peterson from the expiration of his term on the previous winter, and vague promises of future aid in her search had been all that was openly vouchsafed to her. Eyes less keen than those of the little ex-shoplifter would have missed the quick, significant interchange of glances between the official and a subordinate at her mention of her 'uncle's' name, and ears less sharply attuned would not have heard the low, peremptory order which was given as she took her departure from the bureau.

But Ethel had not spent the last two of her twenty years in skilfully outwitting the authorities for nothing. Whether she had made a favorable impression or not with her story it was evident that the whereabouts of Jim Peterson were no secret and she shrewdly suspected that her claim of relationship might be investigated. If a plainclothes dick were sent to interview him and she could manage to trail along to his destination it would not be necessary to return to the offices of the Shadows and admit her first failure in their service.

Walking to the corner she crossed the street and halted suddenly before a candy store window as though her attention had been arrested by the delectable display within, but the heavy plate glass reflected as in a mirror the burly figure of a young police detective who had left headquarters in her wake. For a moment her heart stopped with the thought that he might have been detailed to shadow her, but he passed without a glance and plodded off westward with a purposeful air. His brand new suit of civilian clothes sat awkwardly upon him and he bore himself with the unmistakable tread of one still walking his beat.

Ethel sniffed and wrinkled her small nose in contempt.

"He's some green dick!" she murmured to herself. "It ought to be easy."

The plainclothes man did not look back but crossed Broadway, empty of traffic in the Sunday noontide, and continued west to the riverfront and then downward with the slim black clad figure unobtrusively but tenac-

iously bringing up the rear. A forest of smokestacks towered above the covered wharves on the right and a multitude of odors rose from the heaps of merchandise piled upon the sidewalk behind the screening barricade of which Ethel adroitly dodged when her unconscious quarry showed signs of halting in his pace, for the district was as obviously unfamiliar to him as it was to her.

Finally he stopped before a low, mean shop sandwiched between a warehouse and a fruitstand, its unshuttered, flyspecked window showing a meager display of sailors' supplies, and after a brief inspection he knocked upon the side door. An interval passed during which Ethel discreetly effaced herself behind a stalled truck; then the plainclothes man rapped more loudly and at length the door opened and a girl appeared.

She was a few years older than Ethel and her thin face would have been pretty but for its habitually lowering expression, which did not lighten during the short colloquy that ensued. No word reached the listening ears of the Shadowers' secretary, but she saw the other girl's start of surprise and vigorous shake of the head before she shrugged and turning, disappeared. In a few moments her place was taken by a huge man of middle age whose massive shoulders filled the narrow doorway and whose sandy beard bristled redly in the sunlight.

He gesticulated vehemently and seemed to be working himself up into a rage as he replied to the detective's questions, and Ethel did not wait for the end of the interview, but noting the number beside the dingily lettered 'J.

Peterson' over the door she dodged around the corner and made for the nearest elevated station.

At the same moment Lucian Baynes from a hotel booth not far from the Burlingame was endeavoring to get the Shadowers' office on the wire. Clifford Nichols was alone and deeply engrossed in his study of the anonymous letter when the insistent ringing of the bell at length penetrated his consciousness and with an exclamation of annoyance at the interruption he rose to reply.

"Is Phil there?" Lucian asked.

"No. I haven't heard from Henry or Rex, either, and even Ethel seems to have deserted the shop." Cliff's tone was distinctly aggrieved. "Are you coming over?"

"Cawn't do it, deah old thing!" Lucian drawled with an exaggerated accent and then added, chuckling: "Who said the old birds in that hotel were dead ones? I've been invited to sit in and let a retired Senator and three friends teach me the famous American game of poker! I hope Sneed doesn't kick at the expense account we turn in when this case is over! Incidentally, I have just been smoking a cigar with the proprietor and I've found out several things. Tell Phil that old Sneed is practically a recluse; none of the hotel employees ever enters his apartments except the waiter who takes his meals up from the restaurant, and he receives no callers but a chap named 'Hodge,' who is supposed to be his lawyer. I didn't want to seem too persistently interested, but I gathered that his disposition has only soured during the last few years, since he had his rooms done over and shut

himself up in them. The proprietor didn't know I was pumping him, he merely cited Sneed as one of the eccentric characters with whom he came in contact and I flatter myself that I drew him out rather neatly."

"Huh!" Cliff snorted. "I don't see how that is going to help us make any headway! I am at a standstill with the letter and I'm worried about Ethel; I didn't know Phil meant to use her and I only hope he hasn't sent her off on some hairbrained stunt that will land her in trouble. The kid is so plucky she would try anything if she thought it would be helping us. You haven't heard from Rex, have you?"

"No. Tell the rest of the boys, though, that if they want to communicate with me at the hotel they must ask for 'Mr. Lester Ballyntine.' I'll drop around when there is anything worth while reporting, and don't you worry about Ethel! That young woman has a remarkably cool head on her shoulders and she'll come through all right whatever she's up to! See you later."

Shaking his head dubiously, Cliff was hanging up the receiver when the entrance door of the suite opened and a tall, lanky individual appeared in gorgeous array. The handwriting expert had to look twice before he recognized the usually funeral George in a checked suit and startling waistcoat, with a huge, off-color diamond in the center of a crimson tie and a rakish imitation panama in his hand. From the corner of his mouth a fat cigar was tip-tilted and its fumes caused Cliff to back hastily away.

“Good Lord! Where did you get that outfit? If you’re not a human side-show in yourself—!”

“That, my boy, is the intention!” George interrupted complacently. “Behold Zadkiel the Great! I am blending astrology with astronomy in an effort to rend the veil of the future for the hoi polloi, and I have dropped in for my robes and horoscope charts. Outside of business hours I am a prosperous, good fellow and going strong already with the other show people in Joyland. If you can send me any trade, you’ll find me just inside the entrance to that amusement park, in a black-draped booth adorned with the signs of the Zodiac; I’ve done myself up in style!”

“You have!” Cliff conceded with a grimace. “Fortunately it is Sunday or your connection with our highly dignified firm might give rise to comment among the other tenants in the building!”

George chuckled.

“I was rather an eye-full for one of them; that new fellow in the office across the hall!” he remarked. “Don’t know what he was doing there today, but his door was open and he gaped at me like a fish as I passed.—I must hurry and gather my paraphernalia together for my grand opening this afternoon.—”

He had turned toward Rex Powell’s sanctum to cross it to his own, but the opening of the door arrested him and Phil entered briskly. He was clad once more in his usual dapper fashion and carried himself jauntily, although

his face was drawn and there were tired rings around his eyes.

"Well, fellows, how goes it?" he demanded. "Got any fresh dope from the letter, Cliff?—George, you look as though you had started something."

"I have!" George nodded. "Cliff's refined taste is shocked by the scenery, but as I was just telling him it appeared to make a hit with our new little playmate across the hall—."

"You mean the one who has just opened up that office? You haven't been talking to him, have you?" There was a new note in Phil's tones which caused Cliff to glance sharply at him, but before he could speak George demanded in quick concern:

"No.—Why? He looks all right to me. What's wrong with him?"

"Nothing, except that whatever line he pretends to go in for, it's a blind; his real business is with us."

"What do you mean?" Cliff exclaimed. "He borrowed a match from me in the elevator this morning and seemed to be a pleasant, civil-spoken chap enough. Don't get jumpy, Phil; our consciences are all clear."

"Maybe so, but he tried to trail me yesterday." Phil told of the encounter, and added: "I'm pretty sure he is going it alone on his own hook, and his work is so raw that we needn't worry, only it is important for us to know why he's after us. Be sure you tell Rex about it when he comes in if I am not here.—Say, where is Ethel?"

"Never showed up," responded Cliff. "I've got a message for you, though, from Luce."

He was launched upon the delivery of it when Ethel breezed in upon them. She looked warm and uncomfortable in the shabby black gown and her mop of yellow hair was curling in moist ringlets about her powder-streaked forehead, but she nodded a cheery greeting and then demanded of Phil without preamble:

"Has my uncle got a beard like a house a-fire and a build like a heavyweight champ?"

"He would have, I guess, if he let his beard grow and filled out that big frame of his!" Phil replied. "Bully for you, Ethel! Where did you see him?"

"Where he lives. The main guy at headquarters acted like he fell for my bluff, but he was leery about giving me my uncle's address till they found out the whole thing was on the level. As soon as I made myself scarce they sent a green dick straight down to ask my uncle about this niece who was trying to wish herself on him, and all I had to do was to follow."

"Do you mean to say that you have had the audacity to present yourself at police headquarters on a fake errand and then deliberately trail a detective in broad daylight?" There was a trace of respectful awe in Cliff's tones. "My dear Ethel, is there anything you wouldn't undertake?"

"Not much, but that plainclothes bull was easy," she replied modestly. "It is a good thing, though, that I didn't give my real name and address at headquarters like you

told me to, Mr. Howe, for I could see by his actions even if I was too far off to hear what he said to the dick, that Uncle Jim wasn't adopting any nieces; not today!"

She told him in detail of her morning's exploit and gave him the address she had obtained, adding as an afterthought:

"Who was the girl? She had red hair like him and she sure looked as if she had a grouch against the world. If there is any dope you want me to get for you I'll go down tomorrow and make friends with her, if I have to pull a faint in front of her door!"

"I believe you would!" Phil agreed. "However, I'll handle that end of it now that you've found old Jim for me. You just stay on the job here and take any reports that come in. I'm proud of you, Ethel!—You're certainly the goods!"

Cliff had gone back to his study of the letter and George was busily engaged in sorting costumes and appurtenances for his new venture in chicanery from the varied collection in his studio when Phil took his departure.

The door of the office across the corridor was closed and although he paused for a moment listening no sound came from within. The man who had elected to spy upon them must be in dead earnest to have gone to such elaborate detail in order that he might keep them under espionage, but why? In whose interest had he established himself there? They were engaged upon no other case than that of Sneed and it was inconceivable that this

stranger could be connected in any way with their eccentric client.

Phil thrust this lesser problem from his thoughts and making his way to the Burlingame he sent up his card to Sneed. After an appreciable interval the bellman reappeared and conducted him up to the private entrance of the suite where Robert received him. The old man's manner was as deferential as before, but there was something almost furtive in his attitude and his faded eyes did not meet those of the visitor.

They proceeded up the stairway to the great carved door leading to the reception room. It was open and as they crossed the threshold Phil looked vainly for the peephole of which George had spoken.

"Mr. Sneed has not received any more anonymous letters since yesterday, has he?" Phil asked.

"Oh, no, sir. There has been no further annoyance." Robert hesitated and then added in a lowered tone: "Excuse me, sir, but you'll be as quick as you can, and you won't excite him? Mr. Sneed is all upset over this and he's apt to get another of his attacks, though he wouldn't like my speaking of it. He's not quite himself today."

Before Phil could reply the butler turned as though afraid he had said too much and led the way to the door of the living-room which he threw open.

"Mr. Howe, sir," he announced and closed the door once more.

Sneed rose from his chair and as he came slowly forward Phil had to check the exclamation which leaped to

his lips, for the change in the older man's appearance from the previous day was startling. He had seemed shrunken and frail before, but now his wrinkled face had taken on a grayish pallor and his small, deeply sunken eyes glowed feverishly.

"You have news for me?" His thin voice cracked. "What have you found out?"

"Nothing definite as yet, Mr. Sneed. There has hardly been time, but Mr. Nichols is working on the letter," Phil replied reassuringly. "Has any further attempt been made upon your safe?"

"Certainly not, or I should have communicated with you! If you and your colleagues are still attempting to connect last week's intruder here with the writer of the letter I can only warn you once more that you are wasting your time."

"We are willing to risk that." Phil took the chair which had not been offered and smiled with perfect self-possession at his fuming client. "The head of our firm told you yesterday that we might ask questions which would seem to you to be away off from the affair we are investigating for you, Mr. Sneed, but we have got to get at the facts in our own way. It is pretty evident from what you told us that the person who broke in here did so while you were out of town on Sunday, when only your man Robert was home, and they would scarcely have tried it in the daytime unless they knew your plans ahead."

"Impossible!" Sneed retorted. "No one knew of my plans."

"You motored, I think you said, and the car was waiting while you had breakfast." Phil did not heed the other's dissent. "You keep your own automobile, Mr. Sneed?"

"I do not, sir! The taxi service is good enough for me, as I leave my apartment so rarely, but when I motor out of the city I engage a touring car."

"Always from the same company, Mr. Sneed? Do you ask for any particular driver?"

"They know that I require a careful one but I have always found them reliable. I fail to see—!"

"The car you had last Sunday was ordered ahead for you?" Phil persisted.

"I ordered it myself on Saturday, but all this is mere quibbling! Undoubtedly the attempt at burglary was made during the night, and Jane forgot to dust the library in the morning; that was why the fingermarks were left until I discovered them." Sneed paused and added pointedly: "Is there anything further that I can tell you?"

"Only whether you noticed or not that there was something more on the envelope of that letter you received yesterday than just the address, stamp and postmark?"

Phil spoke carelessly but his eyes did not leave the face of the elderly man, and he saw the uncontrollable start with which his question was received.

"Something more?" Sneed moistened his withered lips nervously. "What more could there be? I thought I had examined it thoroughly—!"

"There were faint pencil marks down in one corner, Mr. Sneed; a series of numbers. I do not pretend to say

that they were necessarily made by the writer of the letter, but we wished to know if they suggested anything to your mind." Phil's tone had deepened in gravity. "The numbers are o-four-two-six."

If he had expected any manifestation of surprised recognition on the part of the other he was doomed to disappointment for Sneed merely shook his head and repeated the numbers absently, adding:

"No. They are, of course, not the combination of my safe, if that is the inference you have drawn, and they mean nothing to me. I am at a loss—!"

He caught himself up abruptly and his jaw set like a steel trap while his whole frame quivered with sudden rigidity. No sound had reached Phil's ears but it was plain that the other was listening intently and an expression of mingled rage and apprehension swept his weazened features. Then with an effort he pulled himself together.

"My dear sir, your handwriting expert will have to do better than that." The words came raspingly as he sought to cover the pause. "Those numbers could have been pencilled on the envelope as a memorandum by anyone who handled it either before or after it was mailed. I must confess that I am disappointed at the lack of progress your firm has shown, but I suppose I must be patient. I— I trust you will let me know the moment that any real results have been obtained."

His manner so plainly indicated dismissal that Phil rose.

"You will hear from us, Mr. Sneed. I hope that I have not detained you?"

"Not at all!" the other disclaimed hurriedly. "Sorry that those numbers—what were they, 'two, six,' something?—are of no value as a clue.—Robert will show you out."

But Robert was long in coming in answer to the summons of the bell which Sneed had pressed, and it was obvious that his impatience to see the last of his visitor was mounting almost beyond his control. Once more that keen, listening look crossed his face, this time with an intensity of apprehension which seemed bordering on inward frenzy and his hand shook as he jabbed again and again at the bell.

"Confound that fellow! He must be in his dotage!" he muttered. "Gets slower and more deaf every—! Oh, there you are at last, Robert! Don't try to make excuses, I've been ringing for ten minutes! Show this gentleman out!"

Robert bowed his palsied head and stood aside silently to allow Phil to precede him from the room, but not before a veiled look had passed between him and his employer that in one revealing flash conveyed an unmistakable message and a warning.

With a final word Phil took his departure but while he waited in the public corridor of the floor below for the elevator he turned over in his mind the curious episode he had just witnessed. Though he himself had not heard it, some sound must have reached Sneed's ears and those of his old servant which filled them with alarm. Surely

it could not have come from within the apartment, whose padded walls would have nullified the echo of a pistol shot! What secret knowledge was shared between master and man which the former would not impart even to one of the detectives upon whom he had called for protection and assistance? Did it have any bearing upon the anonymous letter and the attempted burglary or was there a double mystery here?"

Still deep in thought Phil passed out of the hotel, but on a sudden impulse he halted and scanned the faces of the chauffeurs waiting beside their taxicabs in the string which bore the crest of the Burlingame. The first man was the most youthful, with a broad, smiling countenance that promised loquacity, and giving the address of his bachelor apartment Phil entered the cab.

Sneed had purposely ignored his question as to the name of the motor car company he patronized when ordering an automobile for an out-of-town trip, and it had occurred all at once to Phil that the preceding Sunday had been a stormy one. The eccentric old man was admittedly in frail health and left his rooms but seldom. On the occasion of their first interview he had explained his absence from home at the time of the supposed attempt upon his safe by mentioning that he had gone to look at some property, but had that been the sole object of the expedition he would surely have postponed it until a more propitious day. What urgent errand had taken him forth, defying wind and rain?

Arriving at his destination Phil added a generous tip

to the fare and at the chauffeur's profuse thanks he remarked with a laugh:

"I'll wager that is more than my uncle gives you, if you ever drive him from the Burlingame! Do you know Mr. Sneed?"

The chauffeur grinned.

"I sure do! He ain't the gentleman to leave a dollar go without it gives him a pain, and that's a fact, if you'll excuse me for saying so, sir."

"Go as far as you like!" Phil was still chuckling. "The boys from that company where he gets a touring car now and then must call it a day when they have him for a fare!"

"The Marlton Service people? One of them had him out for seven hours in the rain last Sunday and all he got was two bucks for himself. He showed it to us fellows in the line, and he sure was a sore guy!—Lots of the fares we get at the Burlingame are like that, though; I s'pose that's why they can afford to live there!—Thank'ee, sir."

The Marlton Service Company's garage was only a few blocks away and waiting until the taxicab had rounded the corner on its return trip to the hotel, Phil hastened there and entered the office.

"Five-passenger touring for next Sunday?" the manager repeated in answer to his tentative inquiry. "Where do you want to go, sir?"

"Over to Jersey," Phil hazarded. "I'll be out about six or seven hours."

"It'll be around thirty dollars, I guess."

"That's more than you charged my friend, Mr. Sneed, of the Burlingame Hotel last Sunday." Phil took a long shot. "He didn't mention that you made any rate for him, either."

"We don't but that was an easy trip out on Long Island, and he stopped for three hours or more at the Winton Sanitarium. I'll make it twenty-five for you, though, sir, since you've been recommended to us."

Promising to let the manager know his decision Phil left and returning to his rooms, he sought the suburban telephone book. A protracted perusal of the 'W's' listed under the headings of the various townships was unproductive of result until he came to Shoreville. There a line leaped out at him which caused him to drop the book with a low whistle. The Winton Sanitarium for the Incurably Insane!

CHAPTER VII

CONCERNING THE 'GULL'

WHEN Rex Powell left the offices of the Shadowers on Saturday afternoon following the conference with Phil his way led far from the path chosen for the others. A warm week-end in early September was not the most likely time to expect to find a highly eligible young bachelor drifting about in town without a houseparty engagement, and it was with small hope of success that he presented himself at an aristocratic apartment in that section of the East Sixties which was immediately adjacent to the Avenue, and sent up to Mr. Gideon Ormsby a card that bore the name of Randolph Pinckney.

But Mr. Ormsby was at home and his smiling little Japanese servant admitted the caller to a cool, spacious living-room, where a huge, young man in comfortable negligee advanced in cordial greeting.

"Thought you were off for the other side two or three weeks ago, Rannie!" he exclaimed as they shook hands. "What keeps you in this blistering town?"

"I might ask the same of you!" Rex laughed. "In fact, Gid, I was ready to give myself odds that you would be dated up for the week-end and it was only on a chance that I looked in."

"Jolly glad you did! I was to have gone down to the

Prescotts' but Edna had a bad motor spill a couple of days ago and they called the party off. You used to know them years ago, I think?—Matzu, crack some ice!"

"Yes, I knew the Prescotts," Rex remarked musingly. "It's so many years since I have been in this part of the world except for flying visits, though, that I have made no attempt to keep up with the old crowd. I believe you are the only one who even remembers me."

"That isn't true, old man, but it would serve you right if I were, for not settling down instead of gadding off to the ends of the earth.—Here's how, anyway!"

Rex took a long draught of the iced drink which Matzu offered him, and setting the glass down with a sigh of satisfaction he asked:

"What do you say to a little quiet dinner at one of the roof gardens?"

Ormsby grimaced.

"It would be 'quiet' enough except for some blatant cabaret!—How about running out instead to the country club? You've never been there, but we can get a corking dinner and cut the dance afterward if you like. It is infested with a lot of old boys from Wall Street, but I don't mind admitting that I've picked up a tip or two there that was worth while, and we can breeze back to town any time we wish."

Rex, remembering his mission, fancied that he, too, might pick up a worth while tip concerning Sneed if he could meet some of the latter's former allies or antagonists of the Street, and acquiesced with enthusiasm.

A run of an hour in Ormsby's fast little roadster brought them to a pretty white clubhouse with wide-spreading verandas nestling in a valley surrounded by low, rolling hills, and the voluntary expatriate from society ran the gamut of what introductions were necessary before he found himself seated with his host at a little corner table on the terrace.

"It will be all right out here until they light the lanterns and the mosquitoes begin to gather," Ormsby remarked. "I thought you might have preferred the grill."

Rex shook his head. He was taking a chance of which his companion little dreamed in venturing into this select assemblage among which there might appear at any moment someone who had cause to remember not the scion of the Pinckneys, but the Rex Powell of some nefarious exploit of the immediate past. Better for him the comparative seclusion and semi-darkness of the terrace than the gaily illuminated grill.

The dinner was all that Ormsby had claimed for it and afterward as they sat smoking over their coffee and the tables emptied near them a little circle of older men gathered about the young broker and his guest. At first Rex took little part in the conversation, which from golf and yachting gradually but inevitably turned to the latest market reports. The man next to him, a stout, elderly retired financier, had just described a memorable coup of the old days when under cover of the general hum of comment Rex remarked to him:

"An acquaintance of mine was inside on that deal, as

I remember; an odd, old chap named Sneed. Did you know him, sir?"

"Phineas D.?" the other laughed drily. "I have reason to! He nicked me for fifty thousand once! In his time he was one of the keenest operators on the market."

"I hear he has become quite a recluse since he retired, but then he never cared very much about people." Rex felt his way carefully.

"No. He came originally from the Pennsylvania coal hills, you know, and brought his wife with him. She had helped him a lot in the hard, early days, I understand, but she was a plain little woman without any of the social graces and it was fortunate that she had no aspirations in that direction. She died fifteen years ago or more."

"There were no children?"

The financier shook his head.

"No, Mr. Pinckney; I never heard of any. Sneed lived around at hotels after her death and seldom appeared at the clubs where we'd put him up. I'm blessed if any of the old crowd knew what he did with himself outside of trading hours, or cared particularly. He always kept by himself and after one or two rebuffs the other chaps let him alone, but he has dropped out of sight altogether during the past few years.—Hello! Here's Wallie Palliser!"

Rex stiffened and edged his chair slightly away from the glow of the nearest lantern. Waldo Palliser was a millionaire thread manufacturer and one of the five hun-

dred to whom a circular announcement of the Shadowers had been sent. If he might sometime require their services it would be ruinous to have him recognize the guest of this evening as a private detective.

"Mr. Pinckney was asking about Phineas Sneed," Rex's informant observed when the introduction had been performed and the latest comer had settled his long, spare frame into a chair opposite. "You knew the old fellow; he was rather a mystery, wasn't he?"

Palliser nodded and his eyes rested curiously upon Rex.

"That is odd," he remarked. "Haven't thought of him in years and this is the second time I have heard his name mentioned this week."

"Really?" Rex spoke with assumed carelessness, but every nerve was suddenly alert. "He used to be quite a power in the Street, but I never knew much about him personally. He was recalled to my mind just now by a deal which was discussed and I wondered what had become of him."

"Oh, he's probably living in some old morgue of a hotel, gloating over his money!" Gideon Ormsby put in with a laugh. "He never cared for anything else in his life!"

"You're wrong, there, Gid." Palliser lighted a cigar and settled back in his chair. "He had a fad or hobby—call it whatever you like,—that was the strangest sort of thing in the world for a man of his type to be interested in, but it amounted to a passion. He used to collect weapons, swords and spears and knives of all kinds and ages.

It didn't matter to him whether they were valuable in themselves or not as long as each had a history, and the more gruesome the better. Funny for a bloodless money-grubber, eh? I've known him to let a deal slide that he had worked on for weeks, on the chance of being able to gather in at any price a common kitchen knife with which some dago had stabbed another. It was quite by accident that I discovered this peculiar penchant of his, and in spite of his astuteness I always thought he was a little bit cracked. There isn't any other mystery about him, I fancy."

"You never can tell." Ormsby shrugged. "Maybe he murdered his grandmother, or something! I'd be willing to wager that if the early lives of one-half of our retired monuments of wealth and respectability were to be discreetly investigated the rattling of the skeletons would sound like machine gun practice!"

He laughed at his own jest, but Palliser repeated thoughtfully:

"'Discreetly investigated'? Have you fellows heard of a new organization called 'The Shadows' that claims to do that very thing, dig out family skeletons and give them decent burial without recourse to the police? Perhaps none of you have been so honored, but they had the consummate cheek to send me one of their circulars a month or so ago, and I was interested in spite of myself, for the wording was unique."

"Never heard of them." Ormsby drained his coffee cup.

"Some new wrinkle of a private detective agency, I suppose. They're good fellows to keep away from."

"I rather think that these are of a different caliber," insisted Palliser. "I'd be apt to give them a trial if I found myself in need of any investigating of a confidential nature, as I told young Raeburn the other day; he was enormously interested. That circular alone would inspire confidence if a chap were in any difficulty."

"Is Raeburn?" A lean, bronzed, middle-aged engineer spoke up from across the table. "You mean Gerald Raeburn, don't you? I ran into him in Africa a year or two ago. Likeable fellow and a thoroughbred, but I always thought something had hit him pretty hard in life; he had the look sometimes of a man who had been through hell."

"Oh, come, Holton!" Palliser laughed. "He's knocked about a lot and he has the poise of experience, but he's a lucky chap; he's struck a mighty good thing of it now."

"Mines?"

Palliser nodded.

"They're floating a new company to put it on the market. It was he, by the way, who spoke of Phineas Sneed; asked if he were still in the game. This is no wildcat proposition of his but the real thing, and he stands to make his pile before he's forty."

The first strains for the opening dance sounded from the orchestra in the ballroom and after a few desultory remarks the little group broke up, but not before Rex had accepted an invitation from Holton, the engineer, to mo-

tor out for golf the following day. For some reason he felt interested in the young man who looked as though he 'had been through hell,' who had asked about Sneed's financial activities, and more than all, had himself evinced an 'enormous interest' in the Shadowerers.

But the engineer could tell him little the next day. He had known Raeburn as a sort of gentleman adventurer in a country where antecedents were not too closely inquired into and had taken him at his face value, but Holton was a keen judge of men and the fact that he rated Raeburn a thoroughbred served to abate Rex's curiosity. If the young mining operator's interest in the Shadowers had been anything more than an idle, impersonal one he would doubtless come to them himself in time, and meanwhile, the problem upon which they were then engaged remained unsolved.

When they returned to town together in the late summer twilight Rex invited the engineer to dine with him at a quiet restaurant which catered to the staid, older aristocracy, where by appointment Gideon Ormsby joined them. They had almost finished their meal when the latter glanced up and exclaimed:

"There's the old chap now, of whom you and Palliser were talking last night, Rannie! I haven't seen Sneed in a public restaurant before in years."

Grateful for the palm which half-screened his corner seat from the rest of the room Rex looked in the direction indicated and almost choked. The frail but stiffly erect, little, elderly figure, dapper in the most immaculate of

dinner clothes, was undoubtedly that of Phineas Sneed, but could the no less distinguished younger man who followed him be indeed Lucian Baynes? The small, blonde mustache was as familiar as the slight swagger with which he walked, but it was not until the two were seated that Rex was sure. Luce had suggested the possibility of his making Sneed's acquaintance in spite of the old man's secluded mode of life and had hinted that he knew a way to accomplish it, but the others had scouted the idea. How had he so quickly achieved his purpose and established the degree of intimacy which this tête-à-tête dinner indicated?

So dumfounded was Rex at this unexpected move of his colleague that he was only brought back to a realization of his immediate surroundings by a question from Holton.

"Who is the man with him? It seems to me that I know him."

"Name's Ballantyne. He is a connoisseur of sorts, curios and that kind of thing," Gideon Ormsby responded unconcernedly as he speared his salad. "He crossed on the *Oceania* the trip that my great-aunt's ruby cross was stolen, and he was most helpful to the purser in trying to recover it. My aunt introduced us when I met her at the dock and I thought him a mighty interesting chap. I've often wondered since what became of him and why I never ran across him."

"Was your aunt's cross recovered?" Rex's tone was slightly strained.

"No, but it had originally been filched from some church

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or other, so it was a case of poetic justice. I suppose it is their mutual interest in curios that brought him and old Sneed together. Didn't Palliser say that he had a collection?"

"Of weapons with a history." Holton shrugged. "Palliser's always picking up odd facts about people. I suppose it was this tendency of his to nose into the idiosyncrasies of others which made that detective agency mark him as a prospect. I'd like to see that collection of Sneed's, though. Raeburn told me once about a chap he knew who had a similar one."

"I wonder if he could have meant Sneed himself?" Rex observed slowly. "If you recall, Mr. Palliser said this young Raeburn had spoken of him."

The engineer shook his head, and some swift thought darkened his face.

"Oh, he couldn't have meant Sneed," he replied shortly. "Weapons with a history must be rather rare, I should imagine. One would expect to find them in museums."

"Or the hands of the police!" Ormsby suggested with a laugh. "Finished your coffee, you two? Let's get on down to the Sandringham and see if any of the week-enders have strayed back to town yet."

Holton acquiesced, but Rex pleaded an early business engagement in the morning and bade them goodnight at the doors of the restaurant, none too easy in his mind. As they had risen from the table Luce had caught his eye and winked deliberately, and Rex wondered if the engineer's keen glance had noted the gesture, slight as it was.

Leaving his two friends to proceed to the club where once he himself had been a member, Rex hastened to the office of the Shadowers, to find Phil in sole possession.

"Cliff has gone to get a bite to eat and I sent Ethel home ages ago," the latter announced. "Have you had any luck?"

"Only in a general way," Rex replied. "As far as I have been able to discover Sneed has never had any intimates, and aside from money all he cares about is that collection of his. I'll go after some of the brokers tomorrow with whom he used to trade. Whatever the motive back of his hermit-like existence during the past five years, the old man must have had some close associates before. I met one man who thinks he is slightly cracked."

Phil started, recalling their client's trip to the private insane asylum on the previous Sunday.

"Perhaps if he isn't, himself, he has some relatives who are," he remarked.

"And it may be in the blood, you mean? I fancy some of the financiers he has beaten at their own game would like a touch of that same insanity!" Rex laughed, then his face grew serious. "But all this isn't bringing us a whit nearer to the identity of the man who is responsible for that anonymous letter! Has Cliff made any headway?"

"If you can call it that!" Phil dug his hands keep into his pockets and commenced to pace back and forth. "Honestly, Rex, if I could believe half that flub-dub I'd be batty myself! Cliff had the nerve tonight to sit there and tell me that the guy who wrote that letter, old as he was and

rheumatic into the bargain, had a mighty limber wrist—'remarkable dexterity,' he called it!—but poor control; that he was easily led in minor things but dominated by a fixed idea, and that although he would not act on impulse even if he was emotional he would go to any length of violence if he had made up his mind to it!—Cliff never in this world could get all that from a few penstrokes, but I wasn't going to argue with him. You're right, it don't get us any nearer to the guy's moniker and hang-out, but I have some dope of my own—Hello, Henry! What's the good word?"

Henry's rotund, usually ruddy face was pale and sagged in weary lines as with a nod to the other two he sank heavily into a chair and passed his handkerchief over his bald head. The twinkle was gone from his eyes and a shadow had crept into them, but he responded cheerfully:

"Several words, but whether they are good or not is for you to judge. You young rascal, why didn't you tell me what those numbers meant on that envelope? You let me in for the surprise of my life!"

Phil grinned and then shook his head.

"I didn't keep it dark to kid you!" he protested. "If I had told all of you yesterday what I knew you would have thought I was crazy to try to connect it with Sneed, and you'd never in the world have let me take charge of the case."

"Well, unless it is a coincidence almost too big to be

believed I'm blessed if I don't think that you're on the right track."

"What dope did you get?" Phil demanded eagerly. "Did you see the warden?"

"Yes, and he's a regular fellow! He was on to my welfare-worker bunk, so I came across and said that I wanted to look up 'The Gull' for a friend of his. The warden hauled out the records and gave me the straight goods. 'The Gull' had been so called by his pals because of his many trans-Atlantic trips, but he was convicted four years ago under the name of 'Arthur Wicks' for attempted safe robbery and got a ten-year stretch."

"'Attempted safe robbery!'" Rex repeated.

"That's not the most significant part of what I learned." Henry leaned forward with his hands upon his plump knees. "Wicks was pardoned two years ago because of his good prison record and the fact that he was practically dying on his feet from consumption."

"Huh!" snorted Phil. "A good record don't take eight or ten years off a term, and he must have had influence at work for him to get his pardon for bad lungs! There's something phony right there, Henry."

"I thought so, myself." Henry nodded. "I even went so far as to hint that to the warden and he didn't exactly turn the possibility down."

"The Gull always said that he'd been railroaded!" Phil spoke as though to himself, unconscious of his self-revelation. "Of course they all say that, but he was never the whining kind. I wonder if somebody outside was inter-

ested enough in him to get to the guys higher up?"

Henry chuckled.

"I wondered, too," he remarked. "In fact I was so curious about it that when I left the warden I managed to get hold of a grey-haired old trusty who remembered the Gull and gave me the vague rumors concerning the case which had drifted in by way of the underground at the time of his release. Somebody had been working for him in Albany, not to have him pardoned but to have the case reopened and a new trial granted. When there seemed a chance at last of that going through somebody else in authority must have got cold feet, for advice went out for a pardon rather than retrial and the Gull was so far gone that I guess his friends were glad enough to get him out without delay and call it square."

"It doesn't seem as though the Gull was, though!" Phil observed. "Henry, the first thing in the morning I want you to look up the old files of his case and find out who his lawyer was; interview him if possible and get the name of the person who worked to free the Gull, and who the big guy was that got cold feet."

"But look here, you two!" Rex interposed. "Henry said something when he first came in about those numbers that were scribbled on that envelope: I suppose he means the envelope of the anonymous letter, but what have they to do with this young safe-cracker, and why should they have been sent as a sort of threat in a code signal to Sneed? He has never been robbed!"

"He has never reported a robbery, nor been known to

have any influence at Albany, although I don't think it would be difficult for him to exercise it, with all his money," Henry said slowly. "Do you recall what those figures were on the envelope, Rex?"

"O-four-two-six?"

Henry nodded.

"Arthur Wicks, alias 'The Gull,' was convict o-four-two-six in the big gray house up the river."

CHAPTER VIII

AN INSIDE JOB

EARLY the next morning Phil put in an appearance at the office of the Shadowers to find only Ethel in occupation, but he had not been there long when Lucian drifted in with a complacently expectant look upon his face. It dimmed, however, at Phil's abrupt query:

"Did you get anything more about old Sneed and his habits from those other guests at the hotel that you 'phoned in you were going to play poker with yesterday afternoon?"

"Only from the former senator; the others are comparative newcomers there and I had to feel out my ground, you know. But I've found out quite a little more from different sources, as I suppose you are aware, my dear Phil, if you have seen Rex."

"Saw him late last evening but he didn't say anything about you. He has been digging out some fellows who knew Sneed and his crowd down in Wall Street."

Luce nodded.

"Yes, he was dining with two of them last night at the Dorincourt. So, I may add, was I, and my companion was Phineas Sneed himself!"

"What!" exclaimed Phil. "Are you trying to kid me, Luce? How did you work it? I called on him myself yes-

terday afternoon and the old bird seemed to be on the verge of a collapse over this whole thing!"

"The senator managed it, but I managed the senator." Luce stroked his small blond mustache in great self-satisfaction. "During our poker game in which I was diplomatic enough to be the loser I casually broached the subject of curious weapons, and mentioned a few of great antiquity and historic interest which I had brought over with me from the other side. When the game broke up I took the senator to my rooms and showed them to him."

"Oh, you did, did you?" Phil observed. "Where did you dig them up on short notice?"

"One or two are passable imitations which I had had made to replace the real ones which I proposed to—er—appropriate from certain private collections if I had continued in my former profession," explained Luce airily. "One, however, was genuine; an exquisite Venetian dagger that I could have disposed of a dozen times but because of its sheer beauty I could not bear to part with it. I made up a glib history of it and the senator was most impressed. Just as I had hoped when I learned he was an old hotel acquaintance of Sneed, he mentioned the recluse on the top floor and his odd collection. In courtesy I could only offer to let him show the dagger to Sneed and he telephoned up to him from my rooms. We weren't invited to come up, but Sneed himself called on me and there is no mistake nor bluff about his craze for weapons and his knowledge of historic ones. I had to stretch my imagination a bit but I must have satisfied him that I was

as ardent a collector as he for he did not seem in any hurry to depart after the senator had left us, and when I hazarded the invitation to dinner he accepted without the slightest hesitation and suggested the Dorincourt himself, saying that he had not been there in more than five years but this was a gala occasion for him. I shall have the old gentleman draped about my neck if I remain there at the Burlingame another week; he has promised to show me his own collection in a day or two."

"What do you think of him?" Phil asked after a brief pause.

"It is hard to tell; he is one of the most peculiar characters I ever met," Luce replied slowly. "I would have sensed from his bearing, of course, that something was on his mind, even had I not known of the anonymous letter trouble, but if he seemed on the verge of a collapse when you saw him a few hours earlier he must have regained a marvellously quick control of himself when he came to my apartment."

"You don't think he could possibly have smelled a rat, do you?" Phil's tone had quickened with anxiety. "If the proprietor gave him an inkling that you'd been sort of looking him up he may have been just stringing you."

"Not he! Unless he is more cunning and courageous than I give him credit for being he would never have met me more than half-way in this acquaintanceship, if he had been suspicious of my good faith."

Phil shook his head.

"Still, I don't like it," he said. "It doesn't listen well

to me, somehow. What else did he talk about during dinner beside his collection? Did you manage to draw him out at all about himself?"

"No, beyond a casual mention of the fact that he was alone in the world and before his retirement had been an active speculator on the market; facts which we and all the world know. He talked of things and places in the city that would be supposed to interest a stranger of an artistic and historical turn of mind." Luce drew a thin gold case from his pocket and as he opened it he added reflectively: "I'm bound to admit that to an ordinary acquaintance he would have seemed merely a cordial, well-informed old gentleman."

"Then you drew a blank last night?"

"Not entirely; remember he has promised to show me his collection and that means that I shall get inside his rooms on a different basis than the rest of you chaps. He may even take me into his confidence about the anonymous letter later on if I gain his friendship, and tell me more than he has you. Have a cigarette?"

Phil eyed with small favor the slender, delicate-flavored roll of mild tobacco which he had accepted and remarked:

"It's funny he didn't show you his collection last night if he wasn't just trying you out."

"That is one point I thought significant, myself. But the old chap is full of contradictions and queer whims."

"What, for instance?"

"Well," Luce settled back in his chair. "He's had his two personal servants for years, as we know, but none of

the hotel waiters who bring his meals to his apartments have been able to please him for long. He complains about each one in turn after a few months and has them discharged on some pretext or other, insisting that the waiter who takes his place shall be the one who has most recently been engaged in service. I got this information from the proprietor himself in casual conversation yesterday."

"That just bears out the fact that he's an old crank, doesn't it?" Phil shrugged.

"Not if the charge in the anonymous letter that Sneed had robbed someone of an article of great value should happen to be true and the old man did not want any outsider coming too often or too long to his rooms for fear they should learn too much about the peculiar arrangements there, particularly his safe," Luce suggested. "The waiter Sneed has now used to be a butler in private families on the other side and has only been employed at the hotel for the past month. I arranged that he should bring my breakfast up this morning and for a moment I had a horrible suspicion that he penetrated my British accent, but he is an inscrutable old fellow and never batted an eyelash."

"Better get in with him, though, Luce. If he is the only one admitted at present to Sneed's rooms, he might be a lot more useful to us than that senator you picked up." Phil ground out the half-smoked cigarette and lighted one of his own pungently rank ones. "Did you find out his name?"

"Albert Waller.—But I did get a stray bit of rather curious information from the senator," Luce added, with a sniff of disgust at the acrid smoke which assailed his nostrils. "Sneed was always rather reserved around the hotel during the first few years he lived there, but although he made no intimate friends he was fairly genial and occasionally invited some of the other elderly chaps up to the rooms he then occupied, but five years ago everything changed suddenly. He had the top floor done over and then leaving Robert and Jane in charge he went away, none of his acquaintances knew where. When he returned in a month or two he shut himself up as he has remained ever since, merely bowing and exchanging a few words with the senator and the rest with whom he had formerly been friendly, when they chanced to meet in the lobby. I know that we are supposed to find that anonymous letter writer and protect Sneed against him as our client, but upon my soul, Phil, the mystery about the old chap himself overshadows that mere incident in interest."

Before the other could comment there came a rap upon the panel leading from his study to the central room which Rex had taken for his own and the latter appeared.

"I hope you boys have had better success than I," he announced. "You at least have been doing some pretty fast work, Luce. Did you tell Phil who your companion was at dinner last night? I left that fact for you to mention yourself."

Luce nodded and Phil remarked ruefully:

"He's been making progress but as a leader I'm afraid

I've been a bloomer so far. Cliff hasn't shown up yet, but he's been mooning over that anonymous letter long enough—"

"Who says I have?" A new voice sounded indignantly from behind Rex, and Clifford Nichols' moody, sensitive face appeared over his shoulder. "Don't you know that official handwriting experts sometimes take weeks—!"

The sharp ringing of the telephone on Rex's desk interrupted him and Luce and Phil stood tensely expectant as their leader turned and caught up the receiver.

"Yes? . . . It is George!" Rex added in a hurried undertone. "Hello, George, what luck? . . . You want Phil?"

He handed the receiver to the other and George's voice came clearly but guardedly over the wire.

"I'm talking from Coney, Phil, but not from Joyland. I've located the couple you want; they're out of the old game and running a little postcard-and-souvenir shop on the Bowery here."

"Great!—But are you sure they are the right people?" Phil demanded anxiously.

"Positive of it," George responded. "I've been talking to them. The wife Jen was hurt by a fall from her slack wire a year or so ago and that is why they've retired. Want me to dig some information out of them about anything?"

"I do not!" exclaimed Phil in haste. "I'll be down myself this afternoon and bring Rex with me. Don't get them suspicious that we're private dicks or anything, that's

all. Their record's clean, you understand, but they mightn't be willing to give away their friends. We'll come to your joint first and you can give us the dope."

Hanging up the receiver he turned to the others and announced:

"George has found the people I sent him down there to look up.—Cliff, I wasn't kicking about the way you've been working on that letter, for all that sort of stuff is beyond me! When you came in just now I had started to say that I wanted you to lay off it and do something else for me this afternoon."

"Hadn't you better ask what I've done this morning?" suggested Cliff with a note of suppressed triumph in his tones as he drew the letter in question from his pocket together with several folded sheets of paper. "I don't suppose it has occurred to any of you that there might be possible clues here other than those conveyed by the phraseology and the writing itself?"

"'Clues?'" repeated Phil sharply, and Luce stared while Rex advanced a step or two. "There was nothing else but those pencilled numbers."

"How about the paper which was used?" demanded Cliff, adding: "Any idiot can see at a glance of course, that it doesn't match the envelope; it's a common one, of the kind that can be bought in packets in any cheap stationer's, but the sheets of paper are a different size and far better quality."

"Linen bond, I should say." Rex nodded and held one up to the light. "There is no watermark, though."

"But there's something else that is more important still!" Cliff exclaimed. "Put both the sheets together and you will find that they are not quite even nor straight across at the top. Now examine those upper edges under this magnifying glass."

He produced one and tendered it as he spoke, and Rex complied.

"By Jove! They are curled over a trifle, aren't they? I confess I should never have noticed it."

Rex handed the glass and letter to Phil and Cliff responded.

"It isn't discernible to the naked eye, but they've been cut with a blunt sheers."

"Then there must have been something engraved upon it and the two who concocted the letter cut it off," surmised Rex. "But it isn't commercial stationery."

"No, it isn't," Cliff agreed as he unfolded one of the extra, blank sheets of paper which he had brought and slowly spread it out upon the table before them, keeping his hand over the upper portion. "It is hotel stationery. Can you guess from *what* hotel?"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Luce. "You don't mean—?"

He paused and for answer to the unfinished question Cliff lifted his hand. Heavily embossed in conservative blue upon the sheet of paper was the coat-of-arms of the Burlingame.

An astounded ejaculation burst from the others, and after a moment Rex observed:

"I am not trying to belittle your discovery, Cliff, but

don't let us jump to conclusions. The paper appears to be identical, but other hotels in the city as well as clubs might supply cream-white stationery of exactly the same size and texture to guests or members."

"I have samples here from every hotel in the city of a class which would be apt to supply this expensive grade of paper and none of them matches but this, as you may see for yourselves." Cliff spread out the other sheets, arranging them with long, slim fingers which trembled slightly with excitement. "Moreover the letterhead of the Burlingame is engraved much lower than those on the rest and you will find that the tops of the pages of that letter have been cut off just below it if you will place them side by side."

There was a tense pause while the papers were measured and compared and then Phil drew a deep breath.

"Cliff, you have made the greatest discovery on the case so far! It is an inside job!"

CHAPTER IX

RED JIM'S DAUGHTER

REX and Luce were still staring at the tell-tale papers before them when Phil turned to the latter and cried quickly:

"Luce, you've got the chance of your life now! Everyone in the Burlingame, guests and employees alike, could make use of the stationery there of course; get back to the hotel and find out who have been there for more than five years, or especially who was there and left just about the time Sneed had that top apartment built over for himself, and might have returned just lately. Then weed out those that Sneed couldn't have come in contact with, and bring a list of the rest here at five o'clock."

"This afternoon?" Luce raised his eyebrows. "My dear fellow, that is rather a tall order if I am to keep in my character of a disinterested visitor from abroad!"

"I don't care if you have to steal the register and flirt with the chambermaid!" Phil retorted impatiently. "Get all the names you can, anyway."

"I'm off." Luce laughed and turned to the sliding panel as he spoke. "I do not intend to resort to either method you suggest, but I'll bring you all the names I can gather."

"Cliff, I take back whatever I said about your mooning over your job; you certainly got results!" Phil remarked

to the handwriting expert, who was rearranging his papers. "Do you feel like a little trip out into the country? You won't find it a long run by motor to Shoreville, but you had better take off that soft hat and those shell-rimmed cheaters of yours, and change that bow tie for a four-in-hand so that you will look like an ordinary, normal hombre, or they may keep you where I'm sending you!"

"Phil, if you had any sense of the esthetic—" Cliff began, outraged. Then his curiosity got the upper hand of his resentment and he added hurriedly: "Where on earth is Shoreville and what am I supposed to do there?"

"It is a nice little spot out on Long Island and a guy named Winton runs a private lunatic asylum there." Phil chuckled as the other two stared at him. "You want to make arrangements for the care of some dotty relative of yours, and you were recommended to that joint by our friend Sneed."

"Phil, are you crazy, yourself?" Rex demanded.

"Not by a long shot! That is where Sneed drove to a week ago yesterday, at the time his safe must have been tampered with. Don't you remember, he said he had gone out of town to look at some property? Find out who he is interested in there if you can, Cliff, and get back here before we close up tonight.—Now, Rex, come on. You and Ethel are going to taxi down to Coney."

"But aren't you coming along?"

"Sure I am!" Phil grinned. "I'll be sitting behind the wheel. You haven't forgotten that taxi I bought for the last case, have you, nor my nice new license? I am going to

play chauffeur again, with you and Ethel for passengers. You can get the dope I want from George for me in Joyland, but it will be as a taxi driver that I mean to have my talk with Cap and Jen."

Despite the fact that it was Monday and nearing the end of the season Coney Island was fairly well crowded when a taxicab drew up before the garishly decorated gates of the amusement park known as Joyland and a distinguished-looking man of forty-odd alighted, accompanied by a very blonde, blue-eyed young woman, who gazed about her in amused reminiscence. The taxi driver after a good-natured war of wits with the traffic policeman stationed before the entrance pulled off to a discreet distance and waited, but his two fares made their way into the park.

Various booths were arranged in a vast oval about a miniature lake, gay flags and streamers of bunting flew everywhere, and the hoarse voices of the barkers enticing the crowds to different breakneck contrivances of diversion were drowned in an occasional loud blare from the brass band stationed beside the tanbark ring, where three weary elephants were lumbering through their paces.

Ethel and Rex paused just inside the turnstile and were standing for a moment in contemplation of the scene before them when all at once from their left came a familiar voice pitched in solemn, rounded tones.

"Come in and learn what the stars foretell! Zadkiel the Great, to whom the mystic signs of the zodiac have been made plain will reveal to you what the heavenly bodies ordained at your birth! Only a quarter, two-bits, twenty-

five cents, the fourth part of a dollar! Strictlee no fortune telling, ladies and gentlemen, the stars do not lie! Zadkiel the Great will show you your best talents, who your friends and enemies are, what your lucky years will be and point the way to fame and fortune! Only a quarter to consult the greatest astrologer the world has ever known!"

In a long, black robe adorned with cabalistic figures which fell in straight folds about his lanky, attenuated frame, George Roper stood just between the parted curtains of a shrouded booth with a low, crimson light glowing from behind him, in weird contrast to the broad sunshine of early afternoon. Huge, sprawling reproductions of the signs of the zodiac were plastered in staring white over the sable draperies on either side and a rather shaky framework of electric bulbs was arranged overhead to flare out at night in a crude imitation of the Milky Way.

Ethel giggled irrepressibly as the strange figure transfixed them with a gaze from the depths of his monk-like cowl, in which there was no slightest flicker of recognition, and then, half-turning, lifted the flap of the entrance invitingly.

"Come in and learn the fame and fortune which awaits you, young lady! Let Zadkiel the Great read the message of the stars!"

"George, you old rogue, I believe you are enjoying yourself!" Rex exclaimed as he and Ethel entered the booth and the self-styled astrologist fastened the curtains securely behind them.

"Never more so! Look at this!" A brief grin broadened George's preternaturally solemn mouth as he gestured to a generously proportioned cashbox already half full of loose silver. "I'm a little out of practice but I am doing fairly well, and that spiel wasn't half bad, was it? I leave my clients out here in the ante-chamber, retire behind those curtains and make a quick change to more majestic robes, and old Zad is on the job!—Where's Phil?"

Rex explained while Ethel gazed curiously about her and George dropped the cowl to wipe his perspiring countenance.

"It is just as well that he didn't come in with you, I guess," the latter commented. "You can tell him where to find Cap and Jen. Their little shop is really nothing more than a stand and I don't believe they are playing in any too much luck just now, but everyone who knows them on the Island seems to have a good word for them. They are three doors below the big carousel on the Bowery, sandwiched in between a photographer's and a shooting gallery. You can't miss it. They have a lot of cheap toys and racks of postcards out in front and Mrs. Gillen—that's 'Jen',—sits just behind the counter inside. She is pretty well crippled from that fall which ended her slack wire work, but she's about the most cheerful soul I ever saw."

"How did you spot them?" asked Rex.

"Through an old guy I ran into this morning who is a regular character down here and knows everybody. He owns half the concessions in Joyland, but he'd go out and

peddle peanuts tomorrow if he could boost the price on them. I got talking to him, found he'd been in the carnival game himself and the rest was easy, for Cap and Jen had worked the same circuit with him more than once." George turned suddenly to Ethel. "Has that fellow who moved into the vacant office across the hall been in evidence today?"

"Has he been buzzing around, do you mean?" She nodded. "He was hanging out as usual with his door open when I passed and he said 'good morning' real pleasant but I was in a hurry."

"Why did you ask?" Rex spoke quickly. "Phil thinks he's been planted there for some reason to keep an eye on us."

"So he told me, and I happen to know he's right." George had dropped the ministerial manner that had become almost habitual with him and his tones were crisp. "When I got my paraphernalia from the office yesterday he left the building at the same time, and I had an idea that he was following me, but I couldn't be sure, and I was so busy planning my campaign down here that I put him out of my mind. The usual Sunday mob was on hand and it was nearly dark before I got this booth rigged up and opened for business. I was outside launched on my first spiel when I'm darned if I didn't see him standing just on the edge of the crowd and trying to hide behind a fat man, but he is so big and broad-shouldered himself that I couldn't mistake him. I was hoping he'd try his luck with me so that I could give him an earful, but he only

hung around for an hour or so and then disappeared. If he's a dick—?"

Ethel interrupted.

"He isn't," she remarked decidedly. "I'd have gone up myself when I was working the stores if I hadn't learned to spot those plainclothes johns quicker than they could spot me. I haven't got his number, but I guess whatever is on his mind is his own trouble."

Rex and George looked at each other and the former exclaimed:

"By Jove, I wonder if Ethel has hit the nail on the head? If he's a prospective client and afraid to trust us without trying to investigate us first—!"

"If he is, I only wish he would consult old Zad!" George interrupted in his turn. "Tell Phil to look out for him, anyway, until we find out his game."

Rex rose.

"Come, Ethel," he said. "We'll get back to Phil now and go to interview that couple. Are you sure you've got your story straight?"

"Sure!" she replied confidently. "If it *was* true I'd be game to try that performing act! It kind of gets you down here, don't it, the crowds and the music and all?"

Rex looked at the eager young face, unspoiled by her former brief experience in the sordid world of crookdom, and a shade of pitying comprehension crossed his own.

"It is the excitement that appeals, my dear. You live and thrive on it just as we do and that is why you are truly one of us, only we find excitement in different ways.

—George, you said that shop was next a photographer's, below the carousel?"

George repeated the directions and added:

"You haven't told me anything so I take it that the rest of you haven't made much progress, but I've done what Phil planted me here to do. If there is nothing more in my line tell him to 'phone me and I'll pull up stakes tonight and be on the job at the office in the morning ready for the next move."

"Very well." Rex lifted the flap of the curtain for Ethel to precede him and added: "Phil is taking hold better than I thought he could, but that letter is only the least puzzling feature about this case. Our task is to find the writer and protect our client from him, of course, but to do that we've got to discover against his will what Sneed is holding back from us, and from something that Phil learned yesterday I am afraid there may be a grave question of ethics involved."

"Ethics be hanged!" George ejaculated. "If the old man has given anybody as rotten a deal as the letter declared and we find out who it is we can protect him, if we're bound to, and still not put his victim into his hands. Remember, we decided when we started the 'Shadows' that in a case which involved right and wrong we'd hold court ourselves over the guilty one and acquit or condemn him by majority vote. But let's catch our cat first and skin him afterwards.—Now go along, Rex, for I'm losing business and heaven knows what Ethel may be up to!"

Ethel was standing demurely by the entrance, however,

and as they passed through the gates together the voice of Zadkiel the Great rose again behind them in stentorian tones.

Phil saw them and backing the taxi down he waited until they had taken their seats and then asked briefly:

“Where to?”

Rex gave him the address they had obtained from George, and Phil was turning to mount to his place behind the wheel when a small hand shot out and clutched his arm.

“Look!” Ethel whispered in a sharp little hiss. “There he is now—the man with that office across the hall!”

Phil gave one quick glance over his shoulder at the tall figure elbowing his way through the knot of people at the gates of Joyland, and then springing into his seat he swung the car around and started off down Surf Avenue at as swift a pace as he dared, nor halted until he reached the corner where the huge carousel stood. Then once more he stepped down and opened the side door.

“That was him, all right!” he announced excitedly with a fine disregard for grammar. “How’d you spot him so quick, Ethel?”

“I guess because we were just talking about him; I mean, Mr. Roper was,” she responded. “He followed him down here yesterday.—But Mr. Powell can tell you better than I can.”

Rex explained and added:

“I hope he didn’t see us just now, or realize that we saw him, for it might frighten him off and there can be

only one reason why he returned to Joyland today; he's going to chance it that George won't recognize him and go in ostensibly to consult Zadkiel the Great."

"We'll get hold of George later and find out, but now let us see what Cap and Jen can tell us." Phil stood aside for them to alight. "Listen to the spiel I hand them and then you can both play up. That must be the store there, with the jim-crack souvenirs in front."

The little shop was almost crowded out between the photographer's studio and the wide, rifle-laden counter of the shooting gallery, but it had been freshly painted a glistening white and the bright colors of the cheap wares on display made a brave showing. Two or three people had paused to look them over, but no one was in the little shop as they entered except a pleasant-faced woman who sat in an oddly huddled attitude behind the narrow showcase.

"Good-afternoon, ma'am. Is this Mrs. Gillen?" Phil stepped forward, removing his cap as he spoke. "You don't know me but you and your husband are friends of a friend of mine and I'm looking for him to put some good business his way. Can this gentleman and young lady and I talk to you somewhere privately for a few minutes?"

She hesitated and a little flush of color came into her cheeks.

"I'm Mrs. Gillen," she admitted at last. "But my husband's gone to the city today to lay in some new stock and there's nobody else to wait on the customers. If you'll

tell me who you're lookin' for maybe I can help you without leaving the front of the shop here."

With a glance at his companions Phil stepped forward and leaning over the counter he said in a low, hurried tone:

"I'm trying to find an old pal of mine who I knew five or six years ago under the name of Arthur Wicks. I don't want to speak too loud for I heard he got in trouble later, and it isn't necessary for the folks I've got with me to know that, see, Mrs. Gillen? He was always talking to me about 'Cap' and 'Jen' and what good friends they was of his, and that's how I came to look you up, for I've got the chance of his life for him."

The woman eyed him keenly for a moment and a friendly smile broke over her face, but she shook her head.

"You've got our names right, but we never knew anybody called Arthur Wicks. What kind of trouble did he get into and what was he like?"

"He was railroaded." Phil's voice had sunk to a whisper. "That's why I thought likely he wasn't traveling under his own name, but you'll know the fellow I mean when I tell you something.. I guess I'm not giving his confidence away, for if you are the good friend he said, he must have told you about it himself. He had invented a mechanical stunt that would have put half the concessions down here out of business. It was a kind of a swing.—Now do you know?"

She was still smiling, but her eyes had not left his face and now they narrowed slightly and she caught her breath.

"'A swing?'" she repeated. "We meet so many show folks with new ideas—"

"This was a sure-fire thing, though, only he couldn't get anybody to put up the money and it was the dream of his life. Now I've got this man ready to back him and the girl will do an exhibition act with it next season all over the map, and I can't find hide nor hair of Art! There'd be something in it for me and maybe a slice for you folks, too, if you could help to bring them together. Art was about twenty-five, I guess, when I knew him; he had sandy hair and freckles and a cough, and he was a dreamy kind of a guy, for all he was a wizard at mechanics." Phil paused and straightened with an air of disappointment. "It's funny about your name, ma'am, but there must be some mistake for I see you don't know him, after all."

He turned as though to go, but Mrs. Gillen reached out a hand to detain him.

"Maybe I do, but—could you tell me what he was going to call that invention of his if he could have found anybody to back him?"

She had spoken a trifle more loudly than Phil and before the latter could reply Rex advanced.

"I beg your pardon, but this young man has naturally told me all about his friend's invention since I want to finance it. He called it the 'Super-swing', did he not?"

Phil's start of surprise was not assumed but he retained presence of mind enough to reply respectfully:

"Yes, sir." Then he turned again to the woman. "Mrs. Gillen, this is Mr. Powell. He set me up in business with

my own taxi, that's outside, and he wants to make this young lady, Miss Jepson, famous as a star performer on the Super-swing. I'm just telling you this to show you we are on the level in wanting to find my friend, for I know inventors have got to be careful that nobody steals their stunts."

The last trace of suspicion had vanished from Mrs. Gillen's smile and she responded heartily:

"I'm sure you folks are on the level and I'll be right glad if you can find Al—I mean, Art—for there ought to be a fortune in that Super-swing. He was superintending the building of a roller coaster at an amusement park where my husband and I was playing once. That's how we met him, and he was forever telling us about the Swing, but we ain't up in machinery and we didn't understand how he meant to work it. It sounded great, though! How long is it since you lost track of him?"

"I know where he was three or four years ago, but he isn't there now and nobody seems to know what has become of him." Phil drooped one eyelid significantly and Mrs. Gillen remarked:

"That's the worst of folks in the show business; you never know where they are from one year to another. I'm sorry I can't help you, but I've been sick for a long time and I don't see hardly any of our old friends. It is five years since we saw or heard of—of the young man you're speaking about."

There was sincerity and honest regret in her tone and Phil's face fell.

"But maybe you know some other friends of his who might be able to tell us where to locate him?" he suggested. "It seems a pity, with the chance now for him to put over this invention of his, that he can't be found."

"Yes, it does," Mrs. Gillen assented. "I'd help you with all my heart if I only could.—There's—there's just one—" She paused and Rex urged her on.

"Who, Mrs. Gillen? I assure you that if you can direct us to any friends of the young man I shall be grateful for I am deeply interested in that invention of his and if it is really practicable I stand ready to finance it."

The woman hesitated and at length turned again to Phil.

"Did you ever hear him speak of—of a girl he knew named 'Peterson'?" she asked.

Impetuously Ethel started forward.

"'Peterson'?" she repeated. "Is she a little bit older than me, with red hair and kind of pretty?"

"Yes. Do you know Carrie?" Mrs. Gillen looked her surprise. "We haven't heard anything about her, either, in five years, not since we went on a long tour in Canada, but we supposed she and—and your friend would have been married a good while ago. They was just crazy about each other and Carrie was the serious kind of a girl who cares deep. Couldn't she tell you where he was?"

"I don't know her, I only saw her once," Ethel stammered and Phil interposed hastily:

"You don't know of anybody else who might help us to locate him?"

"No. If Carrie can't tell you, there isn't anyone else

among our old friends that I can think of who would know where he is now." Mrs. Gillen shook her head again regretfully. "It's too bad, for I'd give anything to help him get his start at last."

Reiterating their disappointment they took their leave of her and returned to the taxi, where as she seated herself Ethel was the first to break the silence.

"I'm sorry I butted in like that, but when she said 'Peterson' I just couldn't help it! Maybe you knew all the time, Mr. Howe—?"

"I didn't!" Phil interrupted jubilantly. "It was the greatest stroke of luck in the world that you caught a glimpse of that girl yesterday, Ethel! The Gull never so much as mentioned her or any other sweetheart to me, but it accounts for his intimacy with 'Red Jim' Peterson when they met up the river."

"Aren't you forgetting George, and that possible client of his, the man across the hall from us?" Rex asked as Phil drove with increasing speed past the entrance gates of Joyland.

"Not for a minute!" replied the self-appointed chauffeur over his shoulder. "I'm going to beat it back to town as fast as this old bus can go, and drop you and Ethel at the office. If there was anything doing with that guy George will report by phone and you can tell him for me to kill old Zadkiel and rejoin us as quick as possible for I may have other work for him to do.—Now look out for speed cops behind; I'm going to let her out!"

The renovated taxi slipped gradually into such a pace

as never in its former hacking days could it have attained, and although its driver narrowly escaped arrest more than once he succeeded in landing his breathless passengers before the doors of the Bolingbroke Building in an incredibly short space of time. Then putting up the car Phil hastened to his room over in the tenement quarter of the city near the river, where he changed into the rougher garments more befitting his present errand.

If Jen Gillen knew the present whereabouts of "Red Jim" Peterson and his daughter and,—becoming suspicious after the departure of her late visitors as to their good faith,—might communicate with the girl whom the Gull had loved, Phil knew that he would gain no help from that quarter. In spite of all the other leads which had arisen in the strange mystery he and the other Shadows were investigating he clung tenaciously to the first inspiration that had come to him with the sight of the Gull's convict number pencilled on the corner of that envelope. He and he alone could have installed the safe in the apartment of the eccentric millionaire and not until he was found could the authorship of the threatening letter be ascertained.

His own nocturnal prowlings of the past two nights in the haunts of yeggs who had been his former companions had yielded no information, save that upon his release from prison the Gull had dropped completely from sight, and now on the girl Carrie Peterson alone depended the last hope of locating him.

With his cap pulled low over his eyes Phil slouched

aboard a southbound car, alighting well down toward the battery and made his way riverward, to the address of the shabby, ramshackle, little shop which served as a cloak for Red Jim's smuggling activities.

He found it without much difficulty and at a first glance his heart sank. The shutters before the windows on both the first and second floors were fastened tight, the dingy sign had disappeared, and he knew even before his repeated knocking on the shop door and the squalid entrance beside it that Red Jim and his daughter were gone. It mattered little whether they had taken alarm at the message brought from headquarters by the plainclothes man on the previous day or had heeded a hasty warning from the cripple at Coney Island; they had disappeared and with them had vanished also the last hope of finding the Gull!

CHAPTER X

BLOCKED TRAILS

For half an hour or more after the departure of Rex and Ethel, Zadkiel the Great did a rushing business as one visitor followed another into his booth. It was after the third of these had emerged that he caught sight of a tall, bronzed, broad-shouldered figure loitering about near the entrance to the Midget Theatre, pretending a vast interest in the lurid lithographs of the little people, but with a self-consciousness in his attitude which betrayed the bare simulation of his pose.

He turned with a quick side-glance as Zadkiel's barker began the familiar spiel, but the latter did not falter in his sign-song exhortation nor did his eyes rest except for a fleeting moment in impersonal appraisal upon the man in the background. When he had finished he disappeared once more into the booth followed by a sheepishly grinning youth and the watcher turned again to his contemplation of the lithographs, squaring his shoulders in relief.

Each time that a client emerged from the booth and the barker reappeared for another speech he observed without seeming to do so that the stranger had approached nearer and nearer until at length when he followed a grimly skeptical matron from behind the fantastically figured curtains and commenced his oft-repeated: "Come in and

learn what the stars foretell!" the stranger advanced and tapped him resolutely on the shoulder.

"I listened to you the last time you pulled that, Old-timer! Let's see what your astrologer can tell me!"

"Right this way, sir. Step in and take a seat and I will prepare Zadkiel for your coming. Only two bits and your money back if you're not satisfied."

George led the way and the stranger followed heedless of the titters and guffaws which arose from the group behind him. He waited patiently in the stuffy little ante-room twirling his hat between his knees, but the assumed joviality died from his face, to be replaced by a frown of puzzled anxiety, and when a tall, white-bearded figure in flowing robes parted the inner curtains and motioned him to a low seat before the table upon which charts were spread he took his place with embarrassed reluctance.

"The day of the week in which you first entered upon this life, young sir; and that twelfth part of a calendar year known as a revolution of Luna, the month. I must know what stars were in juxtaposition—?" Zadkiel began in soft, deep, throaty tone, but the other interrupted bruskiy.

"I don't want my horoscope. I know enough about my own character and the past. Who are my friends and enemies, what are my lucky years? Can your stars tell me that?"

"The stars do not lie," George repeated in an assumption of dignified reproof from the depths of his hoary, spirit-gummed beard. The red glow which suffused the

booth deepened slowly in intensity until the stars in the map of the heavens upon the wall gleamed with a silvery lustre. "I, their interpreter, do not ask the date of your birth, but the day of the week and month. Without my knowledge of these the stars cannot travel backward through the years to the places they held when you drew your first breath."

He had spoken in just the right vein of thinly disguised boredom with which the charlatan would half-heartedly repeat a formula intended to convince the skeptic, and his client, assured at length that he had not been recognized, nodded in good-natured capitulation.

"I was born on a Thursday in June," he remarked indulgently and then added in sudden amazement: "What the devil—!"

The tiny, lustrous stars upon the map had begun to move, slowly at first and then quickening until they were mere whirling pinpoints of light. Then gradually their motion was retarded and they settled into a complete rearrangement upon the map. The contrivance had been operated much after the manner of an electric baseball score board, but the effect was momentarily impressive in its weird surroundings, and George spoke quickly before the spell was broken, muttering a sort of incantation which for sheer inaccuracy alone would have mentally floored any bona fide astronomer. Then taking up a wand he pointed to first one and another of the miniature stars and his tone changed.

"Mars and Venus!—You ask for friends and enemies,

young sir! There are many who think kindly toward you, who would be in very truth your friends but you distrust them, you fear that they are but as the Greeks bearing gifts."

"I've had reason to, God knows!" The stranger spoke half beneath his breath but George's quick ears caught the ejaculation and he smiled inwardly. This involuntarily candid young giant would have been meat in the old days of fake spiritualism! His expression did not betray his thoughts, however, and his voice only deepened in gravity.

"There are two,—no, three,—who are your staunch friends, but one of them will be loyal even unto death, and you will have need of such friendship, for you are in a maze of difficulty and deceit built about you by enemies whom you had once thought your friends."

He paused but the other did not speak. He sat clenching and unclenching the muscular hands about the hatbrim between his knees, his eyes staring widely at the tiny, winking lights upon the board and his jaw set rigidly. George essayed a shot in the dark and pressed his point home.

"Just as you have one friend above all others, so you have one enemy whom you hate even as you are hated—."

"D—n him!" It was a mere breath between the tightly set lips, but Zadkiel's beard twitched in exultation as he continued:

"You do not know what to do to circumvent this enemy and those who are his satellites for you are groping in the dark, and your friends who would aid you are as blind as

you are. But help will come, help not from them but from new friends. You will attain your object, deceit will be crushed, difficulties will fall away, success will crown your efforts! This is your lucky year, the luckiest of your life, but be not distrustful of new friends during the next revolution of Luna. If they desire your confidence give it freely, not matter in what guise they come. You have fought against the machinations of your enemies—see, Mars was near but not in the ascendant—fighting cannot avail. Guile must meet guile, craft meet craft, before justice is done!" George paused to draw breath and observe the effect of his broad hint. The young man was frowning, but there was no trace of suspicion in the eyes he turned slowly upon the pseudo-astrologer.

"I'll be lucky, will I?" There was incredulous bitterness in his tone. "It will have to come soon and fast, then!"

"In the next revolution of Luna," George assured him solemnly. If this doubting Thomas were indeed a possible, prospective client for the Shadows he meant to nail him while the nailing was easy and he forced his mind rapidly back over what he could remember of the circular letters which Rex had sent out broadcast, watching the other's face narrowly the while. "Whatever has for the time destroyed your peace of mind, whether you have been subject to blackmail or placed in a false light by your enemy; whether your personal safety or that of someone near to you has been endangered, or something of great value has been taken from you—" He paused once more for the young man's hat had fallen from his suddenly relaxed

hands and he groped to recover it, so that for an instant his face was hidden from George. Then he rose slowly.

"Guess I've had the worth of my two bits, all right." He laughed awkwardly, but his tones were shaken. "All this is going to happen to me within the next month?"

"All this and more!" George responded for good measure. "Venus was nearer than Mars at your birth. There is love, great love in store—!"

"That's enough!" the young man cried sharply. "This is all bunk, of course, but you're too good for a Coney Island sideshow. I guess you know what you're here for, though."

"To read the message of the stars for those who would hear!" George replied, still strictly in character, as with a touch of his hand on a concealed spring beneath the chart table the points of light upon the board winked out one by one. "Remember, young sir, help is yours if you but seek it, success if you have faith, love and riches in this your luckiest year!—Come again, the stars may have more to reveal to you!"

The young man nodded, clapped down a coin upon the chart and turning, stumbled blindly through the gloom of the shrouded booth and out into the glaring sunlight once more, elbowing his way straight for the great gates of Joyland, while Zadkiel tore the beard from his face and picked up the coin from the table. It was a twenty-dollar gold piece..

Half an hour later in a stuffy telephone booth not far from the gates of the amusement park, the late Zadkiel,

fuming in exasperation, succeeded at length in getting Ethel on the wire and after a moment Rex's voice replied to him.

"Sa-ay!" wailed George. "That is one Gehenna of an office we are running, if somebody can't be left there to take calls! I've been wilting in this booth for the last twenty minutes! What on earth took you so long to get back, and where—?"

"Steady there, George! We made a record run in from Coney, and I think that we already know your message," Rex responded with a chuckle. "The Great Zadkiel had a visitor after we left, hadn't he?"

"You saw him, then? I thought he must have been hanging around somewhere, but I don't want to go into details over the 'phone about that conversation, except that Ethel rang the bell. That's a prospect across the hall and I flatter myself that I nursed it along in fine style; didn't know I had it in me to come back into my old form so quickly, by gum!" George's usually lugubrious tones had lifted in pride. "My work down here is finished as far as I can see, and unless Phil has something more for me up his sleeve—?"

"He hasn't, now that our friend fell for your spiel, except to close up for good and get back here as soon as you can. When can you make it?"

"I'll shut up shop and be with you as soon as a car can bring me," George replied, adding before he hung up the receiver: "I don't want to interfere in our young friend's management of this case by offering suggestions, but in

order to make sure of the next one I wouldn't exactly discourage the occupant of that office across the hall if he should appear and make advances before I get there."

The occupant of the other office was at that moment ascending in the elevator, and for once oblivious to the close proximity of a member of the organization opposite. Clifford Nichols, who stood at his elbow, cast more than one curiously appraising glance at him as the car shot upward. but the young man was buried in thoughts which were evidently not pleasant ones, for his brow was contracted and the muscles on either side of his square jaw were flexed ominously as he gazed straight before him.

Alighting first he strode to his own office door, unlocked it and slammed it fairly in the face of the handwriting expert. The latter stood for a moment or two listening, but nothing broke the sound of firm, rapid footsteps pacing steadily back and forth within, save once when a chair was kicked over.

Cliff smiled to himself and proceeded to the offices of the Shadowers, where beside Rex and Ethel he found Henry in possession.

"I've had rather a curious interview with the gentlemanly blackguard who runs the sanitarium at Shoreville," he announced. "Where's Phil?"

"Gone off on some trail of his own," replied Rex. "He didn't take us into his confidence, but I fancy it is on a lead which Ethel and a certain lady at Coney Island gave him."

"'Jen'?" asked Cliff quickly and added: "Does any-

body know what has gotten into our friend in the office across the corridor? I came up in the elevator with him just now and he seemed so worked up about something that he didn't even see me. He's locked in over there now, tramping up and down and kicking chairs out of his way!"

"I think I can understand that, too." Rex smiled. "Don't worry, he is probably just trying to make up his mind about something if a report that has just come in from another source may be believed, but even though he appears to be interested in us, there are no indications that it is because of this case.—Henry, did you look up those files today of which Phil spoke?"

Henry nodded, his rotund face for once very serious, although it had lost the weary lines of the previous evening, and the shadow of grim memories revived by his visit within prison walls had vanished from his eyes.

"I found the lawyers for the defense in that case we were discussing," he responded. "Cliff doesn't know anything about the Gull yet, does he? There is a young ex-con known among his associates as 'The Gull' in whom Phil is interested, Cliff, and I've been looking up the records of his case. He must have been in funds or somebody put the money up for him, for when he was arrested old John W. Hustis was retained to defend him."

"'Hustis'?" repeated Rex, meditatively. "I've heard of him, of course. He was never a notable legal light but he has won several hard-fought battles and he's no shyster. There must have been a pretty strong case against

the Gull or else influence was brought to bear from higher up."

"That is exactly what Hustis claims!" Henry declared. "I read the testimony in the files and remembering what the trusty told me yesterday, and the warden's non-committal attitude, it looks the same way to me. Hustis retired last year, but I ran him to earth at his home out in Jersey and when he found I was acting for an old friend of the Gull, who was trying to locate him, he talked willingly enough, although he has no more idea where his former client is now than we have. The complainant in the case was a member of Hustis' own fraternity, a wealthy corporation lawyer named Ellsworth Hodge, who claimed—"

"'Hodge!'" Cliff exploded. "Good Lord, do you know who he is?"

"Who doesn't?" Rex shrugged. "He is employed by some of the biggest Wall Street interests and he has the reputation for being brilliant but not over scrupulous."

"He happens to be Sneed's personal attorney!" Cliff announced and in the face of the wordless amazement of his two companions he added: "It's a fact. Luce found out yesterday at the Burlingame that the only caller Sneed has received in the last few years was his lawyer, a man named 'Hodge'. No wonder Phil is interested in the Gull!"

"It does look as though the trails were narrowing at last," Henry said slowly. "Though how Phil—?"

A sharp rap on the panel leading from the outer office

interrupted him and they turned as it slid aside and Phil himself appeared, still in his attire as a waterfront tough. His merry face was clouded and depressed, but it lightened at sight of their excited ones and he asked eagerly:

"What's doing?"

"Nothing, except that the charge against the Gull which sent him up the river was brought by a man who turns out to be Sneed's only discoverable confidant with the possible exception of his two servants;—his lawyer, Hodge," Rex replied.

"I knew it! I was sure we'd find the connection somewhere!" Phil's discouragement vanished as he threw himself into a chair and drew his cigarette case from his pocket. "The poor kid was railroaded, after all!—Henry, did you get the dope about his trial?"

Henry repeated what he had previously told the others and added:

"Hustis didn't mention Sneed to me nor was his name brought into the trial, and if he really was behind a crooked prosecution nobody could have known it except Hodge himself. His standing and influence would account not only for the Gull being put away, even if he was innocent, but for his being pardoned later when there came danger of the trial being reopened. Hodge testified—and proved by a number of witnesses,—that he had heard of Arthur Wicks, or the Gull, from a man who had formerly worked with him in a factory where safes were manufactured, as a young fellow who was an expert in his line, but a weak character who had fallen into bad company.

A prominent client of Hodge had died and his private safe deposit vault could not be opened by any of the so-called experts employed until the attorney finally recalled what he had heard of the Gull, hunted him up and engaged him for the job. He opened the vault without any trouble, Hodge employed him satisfactorily in one or two other cases, became interested in him and sure he had reformed, and at last gave him a steady position in his own office."

"Did he assert that he did this from motives of philanthropy?" Rex asked drily. "Ellsworth Hodge was never noted for charity, that I ever heard."

"Sounds like a fishy sort of admission for a corporation lawyer to make, that he found a yegg useful in his business!" Phil exclaimed.

"He had a cleverer excuse than that; he wanted to recover some bonds of tremendous value which had been stolen from a trust company whose advisory attorney he was, and he thought the robbery had been pulled off by some former associates of the Gull. He hoped if he could influence that 'erring youth'—that was his very expression on the stand,—for good, that the Gull would snitch on his pals and help to get the bonds back. All this, as I say, was proved to the satisfaction of the jury, but then Hodge claimed that he, his private secretary and a confidential clerk—both of whom he produced in court to substantiate him,—had discovered the Gull in the act of attempting to rob the safe in his own office, and had reluctantly concluded that the young man's case was hopeless and for the protection of society he should be placed behind bars."

"Gr-rgh! I've heard that sort of talk before! The _____ hypocrite!" Phil cried wrathfully. "The poor kid hadn't a chance to get off, of course, but what defense did this Hustis try to put up?—An alibi?"

Henry shook his head.

"Couldn't be done, for the Gull was apparently caught red-handed, but Hustis claims that his side of the story was the actual truth; moreover that he himself has not been able to get a decent case since through Hodge's enmity, and was practically forced to retire. However that may be, he put the Gull on the stand in his own defense, and although the poor boy must have naturally done the best he could for himself and told his story as straight as he knew how, his appearance and manner were against him as well as the record of the crowd he had travelled with. That I know from the old newspaper accounts of the trial which I read this morning. The Gull said he had taken the position offered by Hodge because he honestly wanted to run straight; didn't know why Hodge had given him a chance but was grateful to him for it, and thought right up to the minute when they ran the bulls in on him that the lawyer was a regular guy. It seems when the office closed that afternoon Wicks went back to his boarding place as usual, had his dinner and about nine o'clock went out for a walk. He testified that he thought somebody was following him but couldn't be sure; that just as he reached the house again Hodge's secretary—the same man who had appeared as one of the witnesses against him—came up behind him in a great

hurry and said Mr. Hodge needed some important papers that night which were in the office safe, and couldn't get down there himself as he was tied up in a conference, but wanted Wicks to get them for him and bring them up to his house. Wicks swore that the secretary told him the combination of the safe and as he had his own keys to the office and had been down there several times before on errands after regular hours the night man let him in without question. It is a building like this one, that keeps open until eleven o'clock, and Wicks had opened the safe and was reaching for the papers when the secretary and Hodge himself jumped him, and the confidential clerk called in the bulls."

"And what explanation did Hodge and his men have for being there so opportunely?" asked Cliff.

"The two employees were accompanying him to an important conference and they had stopped off at the office for the very documents which the Gull claimed he had been sent for," Henry explained. "That showed the devilish ingenuity of the frame-up. It was a likely story for poor Wicks to try to make a jury to take stock in, wasn't it, that an experienced lawyer would send his private secretary to entrust the combination of his safe to an incipient yegg!"

"There is a flaw there, though," Cliff said quickly. "It is clear that the judge must have been fixed and the jury a hand-picked one. If the Gull was so clever that he could open safes where experts had failed, why would so astute a person as this Hodge have trusted him with

keys to the office and made it possible for him to be given unquestioned ingress to the building after hours?"

"I thought one of you would spot that." Henry nodded. "Hustis played it up strong during the defense, but Hodge's comeback was that he had become convinced of the Gull's complete reformation and never dreamed that he would sink so low as to rob his benefactor; that as a matter of fact his discovery had been the result of mere accident. The Gull was convicted and went up for a ten-year stretch. You know that, but who do you think never stopped working for him all the time, both during the trial and the years which followed until the ear of the Governor himself was reached?—A woman!"

He sat back to observe the effect of his bombshell, but Cliff alone showed surprise, although Phil brought his fist down on the desk in exasperation.

"Carrie Peterson! I've let her slip through my fingers by a matter of hours! That means another setback; another blocked trail!"

"Well, I have some news for you in a general way, but it may be useful," Cliff remarked consolingly. "That sanitarium at Shoreville is quite a pretentious affair, but if I am any judge it is nothing more or less than an illegal jail de luxe for people who can't very well be done away with yet whose estates are coveted by others. For this afternoon's purpose I was the only relative of a rich old maiden aunt, who was undoubtedly incompetent to manage her financial affairs, but I desired to avoid if possible the notoriety and social scandal of having a commission

appointed to inquire into her sanity. Doctor Winton is a benevolent, unctuous old goat with white side-whiskers and crooked eyes, and he was sympathetic but reserved, even when I described some of my aunt's eccentricities. The mention of Sneed's name startled him at first but I managed to reassure him and we soon got down to terms, although he was clever enough throughout not to intimate by the quiver of an eyelash that there was the slightest irregularity in the proceeding. I gave him a generous check in advance—which, by the way, he will find some little difficulty in putting through his bank!—and when he had sufficiently thawed under its influence I ventured to ask him if there was no hope for the recovery of the patient who was the object of Sneed's solicitude. What do you think he replied? That eminent physicians and psycho-analysts had declared the case a hopeless one, but he himself could not express an opinion as the patient had not yet arrived."

The others looked at each other and then Rex observed:
"I wonder if he told the truth?"

"That wasn't the point which impressed me particularly; it was the exceeding care with which he worded his reply. I've repeated it to you verbatim. Does anything about it strike you as being rather curious?"

Before any of them could speak the entrance panel was once more pushed aside, this time without ceremony, and George Roper's long, sanctimonious countenance, in comical incongruity with his showman's attire, appeared in the aperture.

"Peace be unto you, children of earth!" he pronounced solemnly as he closed the panel behind him and then thrusting his thumbs into the armholes of his ornate waistcoat he grinned upon them. "Our bird is back in his office over the way, I see, thinking over the dope the stars handed to him this afternoon, through my interpretation. Oh, boy, but Zadkiel did himself proud, if I do say it!"

"Sit down, you absurd mountebank, and tell us about it." Rex smiled in spite of himself. "So you think he is a prospective client but a bit chary about giving us his confidence, eh?"

"He will in time, though." George produced a long, black cigar. "He came, of course, to size me up and find out if he could what game a member of a 'private corporation of gentlemen', as you called us in your prospectus, Rex, was trying to put over as a Coney Island sideshow fake. When once he was sure that I didn't recognize him as our neighbor it was easy to get him going, even though he knew it was the bunk. He's a regular guy but as candid as an open-faced watch, and I pumped him dryer than a well in a drought."

He told in detail of the episode and then summed up:

"There's one main guy who's stacked the cards on him, you see, and he must have been the class and used homemade paper at that for our little playmate is out to get him and get him good. There's robbery in it and a woman, too, for when I spoke of blackmail, calumny and danger to himself he never turned a hair, but the bare mention of a menace hanging over someone dear to him, and of something of great value which had been stolen, knocked

him all to pieces and when I promised him success in love he broke up the show;—said I was too good for Coney and that he'd had his money's worth. He beat it, but first he clapped this down on my table and none of you need try to declare yourselves in on it. I regard it as a personal tribute."

Producing the twenty-dollar gold piece he exhibited it with pride and Cliff remarked musingly:

"It is an odd coincidence that we should run into a case almost parallel with some points in our present one, isn't it?"

"Whadda you mean, 'parallel'?" Phil demanded. "There's no anonymous letter business—"

"If you had studied that letter as long and arduously as I have, my dear fellow, you might recall that the writer of it complained of a grievance not unlike the trouble of our friend across the hall, if George has diagnosed his case properly. He, too, threatened vengeance because of something of great value which had been stolen from him and declared that he would come to claim it.—But it is nearly eight o'clock and I suggest that we adjourn—?"

At that moment the telephone on Rex's table shrilled and watching him, the others saw his face change suddenly as after a brief acknowledgment of his identity he listened in silence and then hung up the receiver.

"That was Luce," he announced. "Something has happened up in Sneed's apartments; the old waiter who serves them both brought the news with the dinner tray, although Luce hasn't dug the details out of him yet. It looks as though matters were coming to a head at last."

CHAPTER XI

PHINEAS SNEED COMES ACROSS

“**F**IRST I had better tell you that hunting a needle in a haystack would be a sinecure to picking out the writer of that anonymous letter from among the people, guests and employees, who have either been at the hotel longer than Sneed himself, or were there five years ago and have returned lately,” Lucian Baynes declared. It was early the next morning and he had arrived at the office fresh and immaculate to the point of fastidiousness, to find that the other five Shadows, worn and weary from a conference which had lasted until the dawn, had preceded him. Even Ethel had yawned as widely as her small, red mouth would permit as she greeted him, for the others had forgotten her in the heat of their discussion until, the protracted session at length adjourned, they had filed out to discover her still at her post, but asleep with her golden head pillowed on her desk.

“You have the lists of those who have actually been at the Burlingame as long as Sneed, though, haven’t you?” Phil asked.

“Here they are; as you can see, they take in the majority of both guests and employees. All of them have access to the hotel stationery and any one of them, given a motive, could have written that letter.—But about last night.” Luce

settled back in his chair. "The first I knew that anything unusual was going on in our client's apartments was when Albert came for my dinner tray and the old chap was muttering to himself and so agitated that he could scarcely gather the dishes together. I asked him what was wrong and although he was reluctant to tell me at first, saying it was a rule of the house that the employees must not gossip about the guests, he finally admitted that Mr. Sneed had 'had a sort of fit'. I told him to bring me some fresh coffee—which gave me a chance to telephone to you,—and when he returned with it I offered him a bracer from my flask. That loosened his tongue a bit and I managed to gather that there had been rather a scene when he served Sneed's dinner. Our client had been in a towering rage about something when he appeared with the tray and old Robert had seemed half dead from fear of him, while even Jane was pale and 'all of a tremble'. It was she who admitted Albert to the apartment and Sneed turned on him as soon as he saw him with some wild sort of accusations which the waiter couldn't make head nor tail of, to use his own expression. In the midst of a violent tirade Sneed had fallen back into a chair frothing at the mouth and seeing that Robert was useless Albert had started downstairs to report the matter to the management so that a physician could be called in, but Jane had stopped him and told him that if he said anything about it to anyone it would mean his own dismissal from service. It was plain that the poor old chap didn't know what he ought to do, but I told him

that from what he had said Jane seemed able to cope with the situation and he had best leave it in her hands."

"Is that all?" Phil demanded in obvious disappointment.

"All for last night, and I didn't think it advisable to call attention to myself by offering my services, even though Sneed had dined with me the night before. This morning—not an hour ago, in fact,—when Albert brought my coffee he was his usual calm, punctilious self again but he seemed embarrassed, and on my asking about Sneed he assured me that the old gentleman was quite recovered, and had given him the largest tip he had ever received from him. Sneed had questioned him pretty sharply, however, as to whether he had mentioned his seizure the night before to anyone or not and Albert besought me respectfully but with evident anxiety to repeat nothing of what he had told me, saying that it was as much as his place there was worth. Of course I reassured the poor old fellow and let him go, but when the chambermaid came a few minutes later I could see that she was all excitement about something. She is middle-aged, Irish and voluble and it took merely a question or two on my part to set her going. One of the private maids employed by a guest in the hotel had disappeared during the night. Inquiries had been made for her through the office but no one had seen her and it wasn't known when nor how she left. She was a respectable married woman, not over young and one that kept herself to herself, but her going like that without a word to anyone after all these years had caused a lot of

talk among the help employed by the hotel." Luce paused and added: "I see you've guessed it; it was Jane."

"Gone during the night," Rex repeated meditatively "From my brief observation of her on Saturday I should not have fancied her the type to run away from anything, and it is evident from the waiter's story that she was the only one of that ill-assorted trio last night to keep a level head whatever the situation was which had arisen. Could Sneed have sent her somewhere to get her out of the way for a time?"

"Isn't it rather more likely that he dismissed her in temper?" George suggested. "Aren't we making too much of this possibly trifling domestic scene?"

Cliff opened his lips to voice an opinion and Henry hitched forward in his chair when all at once the buzzer sounded softly but insistently and with a warning glance about at the others Rex touched the spring concealed beneath the edge of the table at his place. Instantly Ethel's clear tones came to them raised in brisk inquiry.

"What is your name, please? I'll see if the head of the firm is—"

"Confound the girl!" Sneed's unmistakable high-pitched voice exclaimed irascibly. "I want to see Powell at once! What does my name matter?"

"Nothing to me, I am sure, sir!" It was evident that Ethel's nerves were a trifle on edge that morning, though her tone was sweetly deferential. "I have instructions not to announce anyone unless the name is given, so if you don't care to do that—?"

"I'm Mr. Sneed; Phineas D. Sneed! And I warn you, young woman, that I shall report you for insolence!"

"Yes, sir." Ethel still spoke quietly but she clipped her words with a certain precision which made Henry chuckle audibly. A moment later the telephone rang and she announced through that medium: "Mr. Phineas D. Sneed would like very much to speak to Mr. Powell if he is disengaged."

"Show Mr. Sneed in, Ethel," Rex responded and turned quickly to the rest. "Luce, you and Henry go into your own rooms and listen in from there! He needn't know you as one of us yet, and he has never seen Henry."

Lucian obeyed and Henry had barely squeezed himself through the aperture leading to his laboratory when the other panel opened and Ethel, with her head held high and a bright little spot of color in either cheek ushered in the weazened almost ridiculously dapper form of their fuming client.

"Good morning, gentlemen." He glanced half-suspiciously about him with his small, feverishly glittering eyes and then placing his hat and stick upon the table he accepted the chair which Rex drew forward. "I would have sent for you to come to me, but the matter is one that I prefer to discuss outside the hotel."

If Phil had thought him looking badly when he had called upon their client on Sunday afternoon, the change was now startlingly obvious. His pallid face was waxen and a bluish tinge had settled about the thin lips, while between sentences he caught his breath sharply. On their first in-

terview he had appeared more aged than his years, due seemingly to his foppish attempts to create an opposite impression, but now it was almost as though an animated mummy had thrust itself upon them, bringing with it a chill as of the tomb. An uncanny sense of repulsion seized upon them, but Rex replied in even tones:

"You have news for us, Mr. Sneed? Or is it that you have come to tell us something which you forgot to mention on Saturday when you promised to be utterly frank with us?"

Sneed started slightly and his deeply sunken eyes fastened themselves upon his interrogator.

"I am here, sir, because it has become vitally necessary for me to disclose certain facts which I withheld at my own discretion during our first interview. I placed the anonymous letter which I had received into your hands and commissioned you only to find the author of it and turn him over to me, giving you all the information possible without baring a most painful matter that I have been at great odds to keep secret for years. I admit my mistake, I should have seen the writing on the wall, for now the letter has faded into insignificance beside a greater trouble which has descended upon me.—Gentlemen, when I told you that I did not know who wrote that letter I spoke the truth, for the writing itself is utterly unfamiliar to me, but I do know at whose instance it was written and to what it refers."

"You ought to!" Phil blazed out, unable to control him-

self longer. "It was through you that he was railroaded, wasn't it?"

"'Railroaded'?" Sneed lifted his eyebrows and his boring glance shifted. "The scoundrel went of his own free will where opportunity offered, and I have no reason to deny that the opportunity was placed his way through my instrumentality. But I see that you know more than I had thought. Have you found the fellow?—Have you?"

His thin, reedy voice rose almost to a scream and he tottered to his feet, but Rex interposed.

"We have not, Mr. Sneed, and I would suggest that you calm yourself and give us those facts which you withheld from us at the start." He add sternly: "*All* the facts, if you please, or here and now we will wash our hands of the case."

"You—you couldn't do that, Mr. Powell!" Sneed sank back in his chair and his tones took on a pleading whine. "You cannot desert me now in my extremity! I will make a clean breast of everything, but you can understand my former reticence when you realize how I have striven to keep my secret, the self-imposed exile in which I have lived for these past five years in order that I might guard it!—years that can ill be spared from life when a man reaches my age! You will respect the feelings of a—a father!"

His chin sank upon his breast and Phil uttered a startled exclamation as he stared from Cliff to Rex, but George was gazing fixedly at their visitor.

"We were unaware that you had any children, Mr. Sneed," Rex remarked at last.

"So is the world." The old man's voice was a mere whisper. "I have a daughter, however,—unhappy child! You noticed the peculiar arrangement of my rooms, and no doubt inferred that I had the apartment so built through an exaggerated fear lest someone break in and rob me; it did not occur to you that it might be to prevent the escape of a maniac who, although she might at any moment become dangerously violent, was still dear to me and whom I would not place under restraint in an institution while there remained a spark of hope that her reason could be restored?"

"Great Scott!" Phil ejaculated, and then catching himself up he added slowly: "But you've given your daughter's case up as hopeless just lately, haven't you, Mr. Sneed?"

"I have, sir, but unfortunately I did not act quickly enough. Last night she escaped from my apartments!"

"Alone? Unaided?" Rex demanded sharply. "Your two servants formed a sort of bodyguard for her, did they not? How did she manage to elude them and who could have aided her? If you have kept her sequestered for five years—?"

"The scoundrel who caused that letter to be written!" Sneed's voice broke in shrilly upon him. Then he clenched his hands until the gloves strained over his gaunt knuckles, and went on more calmly:—"Eva—my daughter—has been at schools abroad, first Switzerland, then

England, since my wife died years ago. Her mind became affected when she was about seventeen and she has been subject to recurring periods of dementia ever since, but in those early days they were so mild in form that they would have passed for mere moodiness. She was permitted during a brief vacation to visit at the home of a school friend and there she met and became infatuated with the man of whom I speak. He is an adventurer, a thorough-going blackguard, and he had doubtless learned that my daughter would come into a large fortune some day. He had the effrontery to write to me and ask for my daughter in marriage and I hurried to England, investigated and broke up the affair."

"Just a minute, Mr. Sneed." George spoke in a soothing sympathetic tone. "When did this occur?"

"Five years and a half ago, when Eva was nineteen. It was immediately afterward that her dementia assumed an active form and I was obliged to place her in a nursing home, a sort of private hospital, until I could return and make arrangements for her personal care over here. It was then that I leased the entire top floor of the Burlingame where I had already been residing for some years and had it built over to suit my new requirements. I was sure that Robert and Jane would be faithful to me. I went back to England and brought my unfortunate daughter home.—But we are wasting time, gentlemen! All this can be explained afterward—!"

"We must know everything before we can begin to search for your daughter," Rex announced firmly. "You

say that you broke up the affair between her and this man?"

"I took her away and then arranged that a position be offered him which would take him out of England. A year or two later I learned in a roundabout way of his death, but with the tenacity of the insane Eva would never believe it and clung to her infatuation." Sneed paused and then his agitation mounted once more as he exclaimed: "Until that letter came I did not know that he was still alive! He must have managed in some way to communicate with her and in her distraught condition she has run away to join him! *She* was the 'treasure' to which he referred in that letter, and he would marry her in spite of her mental condition simply to acquire control of her inheritance from me! Think how such a character would treat an insane wife and you will realize that no time must be lost in restoring her to me!"

"What is she like? Have you a comparatively recent photograph of her?" asked Rex.

"None since she was a very young girl. She is of medium height and slender, with brown hair, blue eyes and a clear, pallid complexion. There is nothing distinctive about her except perhaps a certain vacuity of expression due to her disease and in her lucid intervals she appears normal in every way, with a gentle, retiring manner."

"And in the recurring periods of dementia?" Rex continued his interrogation while the others listened. "Are there any preceding symptoms to denote when an attack is coming on? What form does this dementia take?"

"There are no premonitory symptoms; Eva may be calm and rational at one moment and the next wildly hysterical, the dementia taking the familiar form of distrust and fear, with delusions of horrible shapes about her, and she struggles in terror with creatures born only of her poor, crazed brain. It is sometimes necessary to restrain her lest she do herself harm and Jane is strong and capable, but always gentle and patient with her. These attacks have been recurring more and more frequently of late, the hallucinations taking a wilder and more dangerous form,—dangerous to herself and others." Sneed paused and then turning abruptly to Phil he asked: "How did you know that I had given my daughter's case up as hopeless?"

"Where did you go a week ago last Sunday, Mr. Sneed?" Phil countered with unexpected finesse. "It was at the time when you thought an attempt was made to rob your safe, do you remember? You told us that you had motored out of town to look at some property."

Sneed's lips curled back over his suspiciously white, even teeth and he clawed at the arms of his chair.

"So you have been prying into my affairs! I thought as much when you called on me and were so insistent about learning where I had gone!" His voice cracked. "You were not engaged to investigate *me*, but the author of that letter! What have you done to find him? At this very instant my daughter may be in his hands!—If you must know, I went to make arrangements for her care at a private sanitarium in the country, but you seem to have

already ferreted that out. We are wasting time in mere quibbling—!"

"Then suppose you give us the exact details of what happened last night?" Rex put in, adding suavely: "When did you first learn of your daughter's escape, and how long afterward did Jane, too, disappear?"

"You know that?" Sneed seemed for a moment to shrink visibly before their eyes. "There is someone in the hotel spying upon my household?"

"There is someone in the hotel also who is connected with the author of that anonymous letter, Mr. Sneed, for it was written upon the stationery supplied by the management of the Burlingame," retorted Rex.

"Can it be possible!" gasped the old man. "You are sure of this?"

"We have proved it, and it is a part of our duty to protect our clients," Rex returned coldly. "You have not answered my questions, Mr. Sneed."

"About my daughter's escape?" He passed his hand over his veined forehead as though striving to collect his thoughts, but it appeared to George's watchful gaze that beneath that screening gesture his eyes darted from face to face in keen questioning. "You know that the rooms of my apartment are built on four sides of a square, roofless court, and I told you it was for the purpose of ventilation but in reality that court is a sort of patio or garden for my daughter's use, that in her sane moments she might have air and exercise. Since her last—and worst—attack of dementia two weeks ago she has been more

tractable and seemingly normal than for some time past and she spent nearly all of yesterday afternoon out on her roof-garden. Jane took tea to her there at about five o'clock and when she went to remove the tray Eva was apparently asleep in her chair. As chronic insomnia is one of the afflictions incident to her condition Jane forbore to awaken her until dinner time and when she went again to the garden my daughter had vanished! A minutely thorough search of the apartment failed to reveal her and the door of the reception room as well as that at the foot of the stairs in my private hall, which is the only means of communication with the lower part of the hotel, had neither of them been tampered with.—Gentlemen, I have nothing left to conceal now, and my only desire is to give you any assistance that lies in my power to further your search. My daughter's disappearance and the manner of it are an absolute mystery to me!"

"You were at home?"

"I have not left my apartments since Sunday evening, when I returned from dining with an acquaintance, until I came to you an hour ago."

George coughed slightly and Rex exchanged glances with him and then leaned back in his chair.

"Mr. Sneed, did you yourself see your daughter out in the roof-garden yesterday afternoon?" George took up the inquiry.

"No. There are only two doors leading to it, one from the kitchen in the left wall and the other in the north wall, from the servants' sitting-room. Eva's own bedroom is

just back of the library, where I took you to see my safe, and in order to reach the roof-garden she has to pass through her dressing-room which immediately adjoins the kitchen. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly, but we will have to see the apartment and the arrangement of the rooms for ourselves before we can undertake our search," George replied. "When did you see your daughter last?"

Sneed hesitated for a fraction of a minute and then spoke hurriedly as though to cover the momentary pause.

"On Sunday morning. I omitted my usual daily visit with her yesterday because I had feared my presence might excite her and bring on another attack of her trouble, for on Sunday she had been insistent that I permit her to take a drive, a request which I was, of course, compelled to refuse. I heard her voice, though, out in the garden when Jane took the tea-tray to her. I had followed Robert from my own private apartment into the servants' sitting-room for a moment to give him some trivial instructions.—But surely you cannot suspect that Jane—"

"She, too, left later without her husband's ostensible knowledge or yours, did she not, Mr. Sneed?" interrupted George.

"She was not in her room this morning and discreet inquiries about the hotel failed to find anyone who had seen her," the old man admitted. "Personally it is my firm belief that she has gone to search for my daughter, perhaps on some clue which Eva may have let fall in a mo-

ment of delirium. Jane reproached herself bitterly last night for negligence, but she was in no way to blame for my daughter's escape."

"Did anyone enter or leave your apartment from five o'clock until your daughter's disappearance was discovered?"

"No one to my knowledge." Again there came that odd hesitation in Sneed's voice. "Do not forget, though, that my safe was tampered with in broad daylight only a little over a week ago. That has nothing to do with this affair, as I assured you, and I was uneasy about it merely because it showed that the defenses with which I had surrounded my daughter were not as impregnable as I had thought. If anyone could enter and leave my apartment unmolested and unseen I feared that Eva, with the cunning of the insane, might sometime contrive to run away."

"I wonder, then, that you did not caution your servants to keep a more careful watch over her," George remarked.

"You forget that Eva has been so well lately. I did not dream that in a lucid moment she would attempt to escape from my care, nor that this man or any agents of his could reach her even if he knew where she was; remember, I thought until that letter came on Saturday that he was dead." Sneed rose. "Gentlemen, I can tell you anything more that you wish to know while I am showing you over the apartment and if you must see it before you begin your search, in heaven's name let us lose no more time!"

"Mr. Sneed is right," Rex remarked, raising his voice a trifle that the unseen listeners might take their cue. "We will all four of us accompany him now and you can decide later, Phil, what part each of us shall assume in the search."

George, Cliff and Phil preceded him with their client and he delayed for a moment to leave a few instructions with Ethel for Henry and Lucian, so it happened that the others had already reached the elevator when he emerged into the main corridor. The door in the opposite office was ajar and its occupant stood on the threshold gazing after the quartette so intently that he did not observe Rex, nor note the curiously inquiring glance which rested for an instant upon himself. His eyes seemed fastened upon George's unconscious back with an expression of such utter ferocity mingled with pain as a man might wear who had plumbed the nethermost depths and Rex paused. At that moment the young man wheeled and met his gaze, then retreated hastily and the office door was closed in his face.

CHAPTER XII

THE MAN IN THE CASE

On reaching the Burlingame Sneed conducted the four Shadowers up to his own apartments, admitting them with his keys, and they caught no glimpse of Robert as they passed to the right of the reception room through their client's bed and dressing rooms to the comfortable sitting-room he had provided for the servants.

There they came upon the old man seated with his head in his hands and although he rose with instant respect at their entrance he regarded them with lack-lustre eyes which seemed to hold no sign of recognition in their apathetic gaze. His bald head nodded more tremulously than ever and his bent, palsied form shook so that he appeared scarcely able to stand.

"Has Jane returned, Robert?" Sneed demanded.

"No, sir. There's been—nothing, sir. No word." His voice had sunk to a hoarse whisper and he spoke in little gasps.

Without a second question Sneed opened a door in the south side of the wall and led the way out into the brilliant sunshine of the quadrangle. It was paved with concrete but masses of flowering plants in boxes and tubs stood all about, their groupings intersecting with little winding sanded paths in a passable imitation of a garden. A per-

gola was built out from the farther side and beneath it a low wicker chair and tea table, the former heaped with gay-colored cushions, gave a feminine touch to the scene.

"I endeavoured to omit nothing for my poor daughter's comfort during her brief periods of sanity." Sneed's high, thin tones took on an almost tearful note. "I would have purchased a dog or cat as a pet for her but I feared that in some sudden moment of violence she might attempt to strangle it and it would turn and injure her."

"Isn't that an empty bird cage hanging over the tea table?" asked Cliff, who stood nearest to him.

Sneed nodded.

"It contained a Hartz Mountain canary, a rare songster, and I thought it might cheer her up, but she opened the door and set it free, and Jane found it dead in the path; it had dashed its life out against the walls."

Rex, who had been talking in an undertone to Phil just behind them, came up in time to hear the last sentence and he glanced up at the walls. They were at least fifteen feet high and of a somber brick which the thick vines trained against it tried vainly to conceal. Nothing showed above but the square of blue sky and none of the windows of the taller buildings which surrounded the Burlingame could look down into it.

"We will hope that your daughter will not meet the same fate as her bird," he observed gravely.

Sneed darted a quick glance at him but before he could speak Phil broke in.

"Does that door lead to the kitchen?" He was pointing

to a small door in the center of the east wall and Sneed started towards it.

"Yes. My daughter's rooms open from it to the south and Jane's and Robert's to the north.—But where is Mr. Roper?"

As if in answer to the question George appeared at that moment in the doorway leading to the servants' sitting-room and Rex remarked:

"He probably lingered for a moment to talk to Robert. Since your daughter's apartment has already been thoroughly searched we will only glance superficially about it and then proceed to business. I personally shall want a further talk with you, Mr. Sneed, before we take any active steps."

Sneed glanced quickly at him once more but made no comment as he opened the door and ushered them into the kitchen. It was a spacious room with a skylight, but no windows, and Rex noted that the door to the left, leading into the servants' sleeping quarters, was heavily bolted and padlocked. Their client followed his gaze.

"We found it necessary that that door should be made capable of being securely fastened on both sides, for once in a violent spell Eva managed to escape from Jane and ran almost around the hollow square formed by the connecting rooms," he explained. "There are similar bolts on the door leading from the sittingroom to the quadrangle—"

"I thought you told us that the only means of communication with the rest of the hotel was that door at the foot of

the stairs in your private hall, Mr. Sneed!" Phil turned suddenly. "Isn't that a dumbwaiter in the corner over there?"

As he spoke he gestured toward the corner just to the right of the door by which they had entered. A square casing of woodwork jutted out into the room, with the familiar small door cut into it waisthigh.

"Oh, that only goes to the floor below," Sneed replied. "The waiter brings my trays up from the restaurant in the elevator and then hoists them up the extra flight on this, coming up himself by way of my private stairs after Robert has admitted him, to serve me. It opens into a sort of pantry on the floor below, which in turn adjoins the linen room. The door is so small that I doubt if my daughter could have squeezed through it, slender as she is, and she certainly would not have been able to lower herself in the dumbwaiter, but I had already thought of that as a possible means of communication and guarded against it. If you will look closely at the handle you will see a small lock in it and the key to it never leaves Jane's person. She unlocks it when the trays come up and re-locks it after Robert has removed them. It is only in his occasional absence that a hotel waiter ever enters my apartment."

Phil examined the lock and then with a shrug he followed the others who had passed into the boudoir adjoining. A sparkly white bathroom opened from it to the left, at the eastern side of the building and a spacious, triangular clothes closet cut off the corner

obliquely to the right, while directly facing them through a doorway in the opposite wall appeared the outlines of a gracefully carved white-and-gold bed.

Sneed himself opened the closet door, displaying quantities of filmy tea-gowns and negligee garments suspended by hangers from a center pole, and rows of small satin slippers on shelves. A delicate perfume stole out upon the air and a feeling of intrusion caused Rex and Cliff to stand aside, but Phil was attacked by no such refinement of sensibility. He swept the silky garments away until he had bared the two sides of the triangle which met in a point at the rear, but there would not have been space even for a child to conceal itself and he retreated, closing the door.

"Are those all the clothes your daughter had?" he demanded. "What if there had been a fire?"

"That emergency was provided for from the first," Sneed replied jerkily, his fingers toying with the black ribbon suspended from his gold-rimmed pince-nez as though they could never remain still. "Jane has a long, dark cloak and a heavily-veiled motor hat, together with a pair of heavy shoes put away in her closet for my daughter's use should it be necessary to remove her without warning, but that occasion has never arisen. Eva has required no other attire than that which you have seen and I spared no expense to please her in her lucid intervals with the pretty things which all girls like. This is her bedroom, and beyond it is a narrow storeroom, the windows in the farther wall of which face the side street as

do those of the library, for we are now at the southeastern corner of the building."

"Do you mean that the library is just back of that wall there?" They, together with George who had followed them, had passed into the bedroom and Phil pointed to the left. "Then the triangular space in which your safe is built must meet one side of that three-cornered clothes closet in there."

"It does, I believe, and this fire-place is back to back with the one in the library, only there I burn real logs and these are for gas, with a stop-cock which Eva could not turn." Sneed swept the room with a nervous gesture. "I tried to make it all as attractive and luxurious as I could for her in her sad affliction, and I think you will admit, gentlemen, that nowhere is there a suggestion of—er—restraint."

The bedroom and boudoir were windowless but provided as had been the kitchen with huge skylights in the ceiling, and dainty lamps stood all about. The furnishings were simple but charming, and the soft blues and pinks of the upholstery and draperies lent a cheerful, girlish note. It was as he had said; nowhere was there a hint that for five years this invitingly appointed apartment had been used as a forcible retreat for one of unsound mind.

They retraced their steps to the kitchen and after a glance into the sleeping quarters of Jane and Robert, proceeded on around the square to the reception room once more. From there Sneed led the way through his huge livingroom into the library and sank into a chair, gesturing

toward others which stood about. His waxen pallor had taken on a greyish hue and the shrivelled features and weazened body appeared more mummy-like than ever.

"You see, it is as inexplicable as I told you!" he exclaimed. "There is no way in which my daughter could have escaped or been abducted, yet she is gone! I realize the almost insurmountable difficulties before you, gentlemen, but you are my one hope! Eva must be restored to me, but the search for her must be conducted as secretly as possible; I cannot endure the thought of notoriety and scandal, the thought that after all the years of concealment it should be known that Phineas Dilworth Sneed was the father of an insane child!—Of course, I am thinking first of her own safety and protection from the scoundrel of whom I told you, and you have seen with what care and affection I have surrounded her, but to have the sad truth come out now would be a crowning blow!"

"We'll come to that man in a minute, Mr. Sneed." Phil took the floor determinedly. "There are one or two other things I want to ask you about first. You said awhile back that the hotel waiter never entered your apartment when Robert was here to serve you, but he's been bringing your meals up pretty regularly lately when Robert was home, hasn't he? He did last night, anyway, and this morning—"

"You saw Robert a few minutes ago!" Sneed retorted. "Did you think he was in any state to wait upon me? He has been utterly useless since that letter came on Saturday, and frequently before that when his doddering ways got

upon my nerves I have employed the services of the room waiters from downstairs. He is getting very old and if it had not been for his faithfulness and that of his wife in their care of my daughter I should have pensioned them off long ago."

"You had a little trouble with the waiter last night, didn't you?" Phil persisted.

"Trouble? Jane had only a few moments before reported to me the disappearance of my daughter and I was beside myself with grief and anxiety!—Rage, too, for at once I thought of that letter and the wretch's threat to come and claim Eva, whom he had the effrontery to call 'his own'! I felt that he must have had a confederate in the hotel if he had managed to get word to her, and Albert—the waiter who has been serving me of late—is the only one of the staff who ever on any pretext whatever enters my apartment. I am afraid I uttered some accusations against him in my almost distraught state of mind, but of course he could not understand and I regained control of myself before I betrayed the secret which I have guarded so carefully."

"You had inquiries made through the office about Jane, though, Mr. Sneed?"

"That was a different matter. I could not understand her departure without a word, nor convince myself that she had actually left the hotel until I had made sure. I acted hastily but when I could collect my thoughts I realized that she must have gone herself to look for my daughter, and I am certain that she will either return or

communicate with me in a day or two at most. What did Robert tell you, Mr. Roper?"

Sneed turned suddenly to George and the latter eyed him steadily but blandly as he replied:

"Substantially the same as you have told us as far as your daughter's disappearance is concerned, Mr. Sneed, only he did not mention the idea of any man in the case, of course. In regard to Jane, he said that even after you had retired to your room they had talked until far into the night and he had fallen asleep exhausted at last, believing that she, too, had gone to bed. She did not wake him as usual this morning and he found that her bed had not been slept in, and her bag and some clothes were gone. She had left no word for him and the shock coming on top of the trouble about your daughter seem to have prostrated him so that I could get no further details from him. He doesn't appear to have the least idea where his wife has gone nor why. Personally, I think he is too crushed to realize the situation as yet."

He had spoken as much for the benefit of his associates as to satisfy their client's curiosity, and now Rex leaned forward in his chair.

"Mr. Sneed, you said that you had a photograph of your daughter taken when she was a very young girl. A glimpse of it will be of more value to us than any amount of description. Will you show it to us, please?"

"If you will excuse me." He bowed with old-fashioned courtesy which had been lacking during their first interview and left the room. They heard his footsteps crossing

the reception hall and then the sound of a closing door. After a moment of silence Phil demanded in a subdued tone:

"What do you fellows think of all this, anyway?"

"I think that Mr. Sneed would very much like to know what we think of it, too!" George replied quickly. "He is sincere enough in wanting us to find the girl for him, and what details he has told us of her disappearance must be the truth as far as it goes, but whether it is the whole truth or not remains to be seen. There's one question in my mind, though; why does he keep remarking on his kindness to his daughter and pointing out the things he has done for her comfort? What should he care about our approval of his line of conduct for? Is he trying to acquit himself in advance of any accusation of harshness which she may bring against him when we find her? Why is he playing safe?"

Phil shrugged.

"We're only hearing his side of the story now," he remarked. "I know one thing. I'm not going to mention the Gull or the lies Sneed has told us about that safe of his just yet, but before this case is finished I am going to sift that whole affair to the bottom."

"Hush!" warned Rex as the door in the distance was heard to reopen and the queer, mincing footsteps of their client approached. He entered and placed in Rex's hands a small photograph. It was only a mounted snapshot, faded and slightly light-struck, of a young girl in a field of goldenrod, with an old farmhouse and windmill behind

her and in the far background a hill with a curiously shaped rock formation jutting out from it. The girl was bareheaded and the delicate oval of her face upturned in the sun showed features that while not strictly beautiful, held nevertheless a subtly appealing charm. The hair rolled back in soft waves from a broad, high forehead, the nose was small and straight, and the parted, smiling lips above the pointed, cleft chin were exquisitely curved.

The eyes, however, held the attention above all else. Big and soft and rimmed with long, curling lashes they seemed to look straight into those of Rex with a world of meaning in their steady, compelling gaze, as though they bore a message, and he searched their depths in vain for any foreshadowing of the mental cloud which was to darken the coming years.

Passing the little photograph along to his associates, Rex observed:

"As you say, there is nothing particularly distinctive about your daughter's appearance, Mr. Sneed, or was not at the time that picture was taken. By the way, when was this?"

"Ten years ago when she was fifteen, on the occasion of her last visit to this country before I was obliged to bring her home, a mental wreck. It was during her vacation when I had taken her from a school in Switzerland and just before I entered her in one in England, and she spent it with an old nurse of hers,—since dead,—whom she loved devotedly."

"I think that with your permission we will take this

with us to show to our alienist." Rex ignored the look of startled questioning from their client and added: "Now, Mr. Sneed, we should like to hear about the man in the case. He was an adventurer, you say, yet he must at least have been able to pass for a gentleman. Your daughter was young, unsophisticated, impressionable, but she does not look like the type of girl to have been attracted by any man obviously not of her own class."

"He was well-educated, if that is what you mean, and he managed to worm his way into good society on the other side," Sneed admitted reluctantly. "I suppose he would appear to be as much of a gentleman of the modern school as the average man one meets, and naturally he had assumed a certain charm of manner; that was his stock in trade."

"Beside desiring to marry your daughter for her money, as you say, what had he done which made him impossible as a son-in-law. Was he a swindler, a crook? Had he any standing in the business or professional world?" Rex pursued.

"He professed to be a mining engineer, and I never heard of his doing anything actually criminal, but he had been mixed up in the deals of more than one shady company and was a wanderer on the face of the globe, without a penny to bless himself with!" Sneed's voice was rising again to an irascible squeak. "He was broadshouldered and square-jawed and swaggering,—just the type to catch the romantic fancy of a mere chit of a girl! The scoundrel!"

"What was his nationality?"

"He claimed to be an American."

"Look here!" Phil had been growing more and more restive during the course of the interrogation and now he broke in irrepressibly. "What is the man's name, Mr. Sneed?"

"Just a minute." Rex spoke quietly but a sudden gleam had come into his eyes which his associates knew. "Had you known this man before your daughter met him?"

"I—er—yes." Sneed stammered in surprise. "That is, I had met him casually in connection with the exploitation of some mining stock over here. But what made you think—?"

"You once showed him your collection of weapons, or at least told him about them, didn't you?"

Sneed seemed to shrink yet more deeply into his chair and his small eyes narrowed to mere slits in his wrinkled face.

"I did, yes." His voice quavered. "I don't see how you knew it nor what bearing this has on the affair—!"

"You will in a moment, Mr. Sneed. You tell us that you broke up the attachment between this man and your daughter, and arranged for him to be offered a proposition which would take him out of England. A year or two later you learned that he was supposed to have died. That news wasn't wholly unexpected, was it?"

"What do you mean?" The old man half rose from his chair and then fell back again.

"It wasn't exactly a healthy country that you sent him

to, was it? The climate isn't particularly salubrious for white men, especially for those from temperate or cool countries."

"I didn't send him! He went of his own free will!" Sneed's tones rose to a thin scream. "Lots of young Englishmen go out there every year and mortgage their souls to get there, on a bare chance of fortune!—But what do you know about it, sir?"

"The place where this alluring proposition was situated was Africa, was it not?" Rex paid no attention to the other's question and the old man's staring eyes gave answer enough to his. He added slowly: "The man's name, Mr. Sneed, was Gerald Raeburn!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE SECOND THREAT

“AM I or ain’t I supposed to have charge of this case?” Phil demanded in an aggrieved tone as the four, after taking leave of their almost collapsed client, were bowling back to the office in a taxi. “I didn’t hold out on any of you guys when I got some dope in the last case, and here Rex has had this up his sleeve all the time!”

“I’m sorry, old man,” Rex apologized. “It looks bad, I know, but I honestly haven’t been holding out on you. I’ve heard a few things about this Raeburn during the last day or two but I didn’t connect him with the case until just now, when Sneed spoke of his daughter’s admirer as being an adventurer and a mining engineer. I remembered then that another engineer—whom I met Saturday evening and golfed and dined with on Sunday while I was trying to dig up some information about Sneed’s past,—spoke of Raeburn, and of having met him in Africa a year or two ago. He liked him and said he was a thoroughbred but that something must have hit him pretty hard, for he looked sometimes like a man who had been through hell.”

“How did this Raeburn’s name come up, anyway?” asked Cliff.

“Well, I had got the crowd to talking about Sneed,—it was out at a country club and there were several financiers

present who had known the old man in his Wall Street days,—and someone remarked that he hadn't even thought of Sneed for years, but this was the second time in a week he had heard his name mentioned and the first time had been by Raeburn, who wanted to know if Sneed were still in the game. He went on to say that the only thing in life which interested Sneed besides money was a collection of weapons, and the chap who had met Raeburn in Africa spoke up and said that Raeburn had known a man who had a similar collection. That was really all I had to go on when I hazarded that guess—!"

"What is the matter?" George leaned forward and stared into his friend's face as Rex halted suddenly.

"Great heavens! It couldn't be, and yet—!" He spoke as if to himself, in a tone of mingled amazement and incredulity. "Broadshouldered and square-jawed,—like a movie Westerner, Ethel said—"

"Rex, if you don't come out of that trance and tell us what has hit you—!" Phil began in exasperation, but the other broke in.

"Raeburn's name didn't come up in that conversation just the way I said it did! I remember now! There was a man present to whom I had sent one of the circular announcements of the Shadows and he spoke of us; said he had shown the circular to 'young Raeburn' and he had been enormously interested. Of course I kept discreetly silent, but can't you see what I'm driving at now? Young man, splendid physique, curious about us, has had some sort of a rotten deal or pretends that he has—"

"Holy cat!" Phil exclaimed. "The guy across the hall!—Say, you're nearest; tell this fellow to drive like—oh, we're here!"

They piled out of the taxi, tossed a double fare to the chauffeur and dived into the Bolingbroke building, but the elevator cages were empty and as they stood waiting for a car to descend George moaned:

"If only I had had an inkling of this yesterday! I could have laid on that message from the stars so thick that he would have bolted straight for our office instead of his own. He couldn't have had a hand personally in abducting Sneed's daughter or helping her to escape, though, for he was here in his office at the time she disappeared. We're a fine lot of sleuths! Here the man we have been looking for was right under our noses all the time!"

"How do you know he was?" Cliff demanded. "He might have dictated that letter but he didn't write it, and Phil's excitement about this person called the 'Gull' set us all off in quite other directions."

"I don't care!" Phil declared doggedly. "You'll find before we're through that the Gull had a whole lot more to do with this case than you think now!"

The descent of the elevator put an end to the argument and they mounted to their own floor in a silence which was pregnant with strained suspense.

Alighting, they waited until the elevator had disappeared from view and then made their way down the corridor to the still unlettered office opposite their own suite. To their surprise they saw that the door was slightly ajar and

when no sound came from within Phil whispered to George:

"Go ahead and knock. You're the only one of us who has talked with him."

George rapped firmly but no response came and after a glance at the others he pushed the door open. Save some blank papers littering the floor the office was empty.

"Stung!" Phil wailed, while the rest stood speechless with astonishment and dismay. "First 'Red' Peter: a girl and now this guy! He made a quick getaway in the last hour, furniture and all! You fellows go into our place and wait for me; I'm going down to have a talk with the superintendent!"

He shot off toward the elevators and the others after a final glance around the empty office of their late neighbor went slowly to their own.

"Did you notice that the man across the hall has gone?" Ethel greeted them as they entered. "I heard some banging and banging going on out there and opened the door just in time to see a couple of men carting off his desk and chairs; that's all he had in there."

"We saw that the office was empty as we passed," George spoke with assumed carelessness, but after George Cliff had joined the wildly impatient Luce and Henry in the council room he lingered for a moment. "You didn't see the fellow himself, did you?"

"Sure I did!" she affirmed. "He was standing in the doorway watching the second-hand men—"

"Gracious, child! How do you know they were?"

asked, amused in spite of the anxiety of the moment. "He might have been sending his stuff to storage—"

"Did you ever hear of a storage man giving you money to let him take your things away?" Ethel demanded imperturbably. "That's what the old gink with the whiskers did; gave the man who had the office a couple of bills off of a roll that would choke a tunnel and then he and the other second-hand guy went away leaving the man still standing there. I felt awful sorry for him."

"Why?"

"I guess he must've failed before he started, whatever business it was he tried to horn in on, for he looked kind of sad and angry, too, like somebody had double-crossed him. He'd ought to have had some pal around to slap him on the back and tell him to buck up, but he sort of did that for himself after a minute or two. He stood turning his hat over and over in his hands and looking down at it, and then all at once he straightened and put his shoulders back and started off for the elevator without even stopping to shut the door behind him."

"Did he see you?"

"He didn't see anything except just what he was thinking about but he wasn't walking in his sleep; he stepped out like he'd made up his mind and knew where he was going and what he was after." She shrugged and then asked with a change of tone: "Is that old grasshopper who was here and called me 'young woman' the guy we're working now?"

"Yes, Ethel," Rex responded gravely although his eyes still twinkled. "We're handling his case now."

Her small chin was lifted ever so slightly.

"He said he was going to report me for insolence because I wouldn't send him in without getting his name first. Gee, it isn't such a pretty one, Mr. Powell, but that he can keep it to himself and welcome, for all of me! I hope you get him and get him good!"

With a nod and smile Rex slid the panel aside and entered the hexagonal inner office where he found Henry and Luce listening raptly to George's description of what had taken place during their visit to Sneed. Cliff sat a little apart studying the photograph of the missing girl.

"There doesn't appear to be any sign of insanity in that face, do you think?" Rex asked with a gesture toward the slip of cardboard. "Has Henry seen it?"

"You wouldn't expect even a real alienist to get anything from that snapshot, would you?" Henry retorted. "It's clear, though, if it is faded and it will come in handy as a means of identification when we find the girl."

"I wasn't looking at her for the moment but at the old house and the hill behind it," Cliff spoke absently. "Do you see that rock jutting out from it shaped like the head of an animal? There is something familiar about that view and I fancy I must have seen it a long time ago.—But I head that you pulled off some big stuff, Rex, and doped out the name of the villain who has run off with Sneed's daughter!"

Rex commenced a modest disclaimer when the panel

was thrust violently aside and Phil strode in, to fling himself into a chair.

"That guy across the hall called himself 'Raynor' and said he was a mining promoter," he announced. "He'd taken the office for a year, but this morning just after we left he went out and came back with cash to pay the full term of his lease, and a couple of men in tow to take away the few sticks of furniture he had put in. He was pleasant spoken enough, but the superintendent wasn't sorry to see him go, for he thought it was funny that Raynor had no callers and made no move to have a phone installed; he was afraid he might try to run some fake scheme or con game. Raynor told him that he was suddenly called West again, but the superintendent thinks that his mining company, whatever it was, has failed."

"So does Ethel," Rex remarked. "If you think he is the man we are after, Phil, that makes three missing persons whom we must find; Eva Sneed, Jane and Raeburn."

Phil nodded.

"I didn't realize what I was wishing on myself when I asked you fellows to let me handle this case, but I'm not going to welch now. You made a pretty close guess the other day, Rex, when you said that if old Sneed kept a harem he couldn't guard it more carefully. It wasn't a harem, though, just one poor, loony girl!—And say, there's something else I can't get through my head; you told Jen Gillen down at Coney yesterday that the Gull called his invention the 'Super-swing'. How did you know?"

"You said so yourself, the minute you laid eyes on Sneed's safe!—By the way, are you going to let that end of your investigation drop—those convict numbers, I mean, that were on the corner of the envelope?"

"Not by a long shot! The Gull or someone acting for him is mixed up in this affair, but the first thing is to find Raeburn and the girl." Phil shook his head. "I'm up a tree about that guy; unless he's on to our working for Sneed and is playing a part, his manner this morning certainly didn't show that he was as happy as he'd ought to be if he had got the girl and knew she was safe, but maybe he thought she was really sane and now she's gone suddenly cuckoo on his hands! His making a getaway this morning looks funny—"

"Not to me," George interrupted. "He wasn't watching us on account of our connection with the case, because he took that office before Sneed ever called us in and he'd heard of us, remember, through one of our circulars which a friend of his had received. It is my opinion that he meant to give us a stall and engage us on his own behalf to find Sneed's daughter for him."

"Then why did he go—"

"I can answer that, if George's hypothesis is correct," Rex interrupted. "When we left the office with Sneed this morning you two and Cliff walked ahead to the elevator and I followed behind. Raynor, as he called himself, stood in his doorway and I thought it was George at whom he was looking but I see now that it must have been Sneed. He had the same expression on his face that my engineer

friend probably saw there when he said he looked like a man who had been through hell. I think he was on the point of consulting us and then suddenly saw Sneed and realized that we were in his pay; that was why he lost no time in getting away."

"All right, Rex; then we'll lose no more time in finding him again!" Phil straightened in his chair with an air of decision. "I want you to get hold of that man who showed him the circular, and that engineer who knew Raeburn in Africa and get all the dope on him that you can, especially as to when he came back to New York, where he has been living and if he has an elderly English servant or buddy of some sort. Take Luce with you if you like; he can mix with those kind of highbrow guys that you know."

"I think I will," Rex replied slowly with a smile. "Luce already knows a friend of mine who may be useful to us. His great aunt introduced them; she had taken a great fancy to the solicitous Mr. Ballantyne."

"What the deuce—!" Lucian stared.

"It was a little matter of a ruby cross which disappeared during a voyage on a trans-Atlantic liner," explained Rex blandly. "We'll settle the details of our campaign later. What are you going to do about the girl herself, Phil? How do you think she escaped from the Burlingame?"

"There was a guy sent up for pinching college dough, when I was doing my first stretch, who used to tell me about a nutty idea that he called 'the fourth dimension,'" Phil observed. "If there was any sense to the darned thing I'd say that was the only way Sneed's daughter

could have beaten it. If a girl who's half dippy managed it we ought to be able to dope out how she worked it; I'll bet another woman could, they can always get on to each other's curves, somehow. Ethel's a little queen, but we couldn't very well plant her in the hotel as a guest the way we did Luce. She can be up-stage for a few minutes at a time but somebody'd get her goat and she'd come back with a line of Third Avenue repartee and it would be all off.—Besides, I want Henry to take a room there. He could pass for a Southerner who had heard of the Burlingame from one of the F. F. Vs. Got a southern accent, Henry?"

"Ah have, suh!" Henry responded with dignity. "I made a right long visit to Atlanta, Geo'giah once, though Ah saw ve'y little of that fair city, suh!"

"You'll do!" George grinned and then his face sobered as a fresh thought came to him. "Say, couldn't Henry have come North to have a little visit with his niece and take her to the Burlingame for a stay? She can play a brisk young business woman to the life."

Phil looked at Rex, who nodded.

"It might work," the former said slowly. "Let's call her in and put it up to her. She ought to be tickled to death at the chance to live at a swell hotel like that for a few days."

But Ethel was not at all enthusiastic at the prospect, for strictly personal reasons.

"I'd do anything to help your game along, whatever it is," she protested. "I was respectful to that horrid old

man this morning because it's part of my job here in this office, but if he should lamp me in that hotel and give me any more of his lip—!"

"He won't, Ethel," Rex promised. "There's a young lady who is a—a sort of invalid missing from his apartment. No one in the hotel except his own servants knows that she was ever there and we want to find out if possible how she got out and who helped her. She's his daughter."

Ethel's eyes and mouth opened wide.

"Why didn't anybody know?" Her quick mind flew to the truth. "What's the matter with her? Is she a nut?"

"Just a little weak in the upper story, my dear," Henry explained. "If she should return and you run into her you needn't be afraid of her—"

"Huh! Four men couldn't handle my dad when he was on a regular jag and going strong, but I could make him eat out of my hand! I guess I'm not scared of any skirt, no matter how batty she is!" Ethel announced in fine scorn. It was the first time in their association that she had referred to her antecedents, but the Shadows forebore to make her conscious of her revelation by glancing at each other. "I don't get on to this game any more than I did the other but if you'll give me the dope on it and tell the old guy to lay off of me, I'll go right along with—with Uncle Henry."

Rex told her as many of the details as he thought prudent, coaching her in the part she was about to play and added diplomatically:

"Phil—Mr. Howe—will get Sneed out of the way and

give you an opportunity to examine Miss Sneed's rooms thoroughly and the little roof court or garden where she was last seen yesterday afternoon. If you can just put yourself in that girl's place and imagine that you were locked up there for a long time, during part of which you were conscious and realized everything while the rest was like a horrible dream—"

"I'd get out," Ethel interrupted briefly. "I'd beat it if I had to claw the walls down, and I guess what that girl did I can do, whether she had somebody to help her or not. Are we going there right now, Uncle Henry?"

"That's the stuff!" Phil chuckled. "I'll fix it for Sneed to come here this afternoon and his old manservant will let you in his apartment. Get a room for Ethel as near the entrance to Sneed's private hall and stairway as you can, Henry, and then you hang around the lobby and smoking-room and mix in. We'll do the rest.—George, did you get anything more out of old Robert than you told us there in front of Sneed himself?"

"Not very much for he was too dazed from the shock of his wife's desertion. *He* hasn't any delusion that she has gone to search for the missing girl nor does he seem to have figured out where she may be. As a matter of fact, he didn't speak as though he thought she were coming back. It's easy to see that she has done the thinking for both of them all these years, and whatever emotion he showed because of her departure was not grief so much as downright fear." George tilted his chair back and gazed ruminatively at the ceiling. "The old fellow is

scared to death about something, and he wouldn't talk of Sneed's daughter at all except to say that he had only acted under his employer's orders. The last he saw of the girl was when she passed through the kitchen on her way out to the roof garden early in the afternoon. I'd like to have another chance to pump him about his wife—."

"That's what I want you to do," Phil interrupted. "Find out where she came from originally and who her relatives and friends are. Get as much of a line on her as you can and follow up any lead old Robert may give you. When Sneed comes here this afternoon to interview Cliff—"

"What's that?" interrupted Cliff in his turn. "Am I to be left here to keep house while all the rest of you take a hand in the game, even Ethel? I haven't any excuse for interviewing the old chap, either."

He spoke in an aggrieved tone but before Phil could reply the bell of the main telephone in the outer office rang and Rex replied to it, for Ethel and Henry had taken their departure. When he returned to the others his face was very grave.

"That was Sneed himself on the wire, and you won't have to invent any excuse for interviewing him, Cliff. He has received another anonymous letter!"

"What!" Phil exclaimed. "Is it in the same handwriting? When was it mailed? Is he on his way here now?"

"No. I told him to come at two this afternoon, so as to give Henry and Ethel an opportunity to establish themselves," Rex replied to the last question first. "He says

it is the same writing and on the same paper, but it wasn't mailed at all. Robert found it in the lower hall just now at the foot of the private staircase where someone had pushed it under the door, and the ink was scarcely dry upon it!"

CHAPTER XIV

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS

WHEN Phineas Sneed in a state of mind that bordered on frenzy, presented himself at the office of the Shadowers at the appointed time he found only Clifford waiting to receive him.

"What does this mean?" he sputtered. "Where is Powell? Where are the others? Here I received a most astounding communication from the scoundrel who is persecuting me, and—"

"All the other members of our firm are actively engaged in the search for your daughter," Clifford explained patiently. "They thought that of more importance even than another threatening note to you, Mr. Sneed. You have brought it with you, of course?"

"But Powell put me off this morning! They should all have seen this at once!" the old man fumed as he fumbled in his pocket with a shaking hand.

"Whatever it contains, it was left to me to take care of, as the handwriting expert of our association, and I have been out until now on a special mission connected with your case," Cliff retorted with dignity as he took the envelope which the other extended. Drawing from it a single sheet of paper, he read aloud:—

“PHINEAS SNEED.

This is your last warning. cannot stop my purpose, and the men you have hire find themselves in trouble if they try to interfere me, for nothing on earth can keep from me what is I will give you twenty-four hours to make up your and if you decide to restore what you have robbed n have the shades of all your windows rolled up to th on Wednesday, when further instructions will follow you do not I shall act.”

“What am I to do?” Sneed’s walking stick clatter the floor and he sank into a chair. “How can he discovered that I consulted you? The blackguard to dictate terms to me, Nichols, he gives me twenty hours! The situation is drastic, hideous!”

Cliff raised his eyebrows slightly.

“Surely not more so than when your daughter appeared,” he observed. “It’s either a very clever bl his part to throw us off the track and gain time if daughter has already joined him, or else he is actua ignorant of her whereabouts as you are, in which ca situation is indeed drastic—for *her*. Your personal : at least has not been literally threatened, but for a g unsound mind to be wandering alone in a strange cit

“She could not have gotten far in such attire,— gown and satin slippers!” Sneed made a contemp gesture. “She has had help of some sort and where it have come from but from him? You and your

ciates learned the man's identity without my telling you; why haven't you taken steps before now to prevent this outrage?"

But Cliff had produced the first letter and was comparing the two, apparently oblivious to the other's tirade.

"The paper is identical and the handwriting, too, unless this is a more clever forgery than I have ever seen before," he remarked. "Someone had pushed it under the entrance door of your apartment, where Robert found it, I believe?"

"Yes. The ink was still fresh upon it and the envelope damp where it had been sealed when he brought it to me!"

"When was this?"

"At about twelve, just before I telephoned to the head of your firm. I sent for some of the hotel stationery and compared it myself!" Sneed was clutching at the arms of his chair and his small eyes fairly glittered. "Who is the spy at the Burlingame?"

"Mr. Sneed, just how much of your private affairs do Robert and Jane know?" Cliff asked. "Have you specimens of their handwriting with you, by any chance?"

"Great heavens!" the old man exclaimed. "Surely you cannot suspect them! They are both faithful. I've seen to that, I've bound them to me with the strongest tie in the world!"

"Money?" Cliff shrugged. "What if Raeburn has outbid you? We know that he has a good thing on now and is in the way to making a fortune."

Sneed shook his head and the ghost of a sly smile hovered for an instant about his thin, bloodless lips.

"It is a stronger tie even than money, Mr. Nichols," he retorted, but checked himself, and once more he commenced searching his pockets. "As a matter of fact, I think I may have a list here made out by Jane a day or two ago of some little things to be purchased for my daughter, and as for Robert, he is so palsied that he has been unable to write a line for a year or two.—Here is the list."

Cliff ran his eye rapidly down the short column of items of toilet articles and food delicacies written in a bold, decisive hand, and then returned it to his client.

"Jane is out of it, but are you positive that Robert is incapable of guiding a pen? The woman disappeared only a few hours after your daughter and she may have concocted this whole scheme months ago, waiting only for a propitious moment to carry it out and force you to pay ransom. Her husband is old and weak and if she dominated him, compelled or persuaded him to go into this plot with her and write the letters at her dictation—?"

"Stuff and nonsense!" Sneed smote his chair sharply. "Don't try to pull the wool over my eyes by inventing this wild theory to gain time! I tell you they knew nothing of Raeburn and if my daughter has raved Jane was too well aware of her condition to pay any attention. No one could have dictated those letters but Raeburn himself and he would never have approached my servants!"

Cliff started to reply but the telephone in the outer office rang, and excusing himself he went to it, carefully closing the panel behind him.

"Is this Mr. Nichols?" Ethel's voice, primly modulated but trembling slightly from excitement came to his ears. "This is Miss Jepson. My uncle, Doctor Carter, wished me to call you up and ask you to—to string out that conference you are having as long as possible. He—he can't connect yet with the people he wants to see. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Miss Jepson." Cliff smiled to himself. "Tell the doctor that his friend will wait here in my office at least an hour longer."

Cutting short her murmured thanks he hung up the receiver and rejoined his client, wondering the while what lead Henry could have chanced upon which Sneed's presence in the hotel would interfere with his following up. It could not have been found in the latter's apartment for Henry had been carefully instructed to confine his operations to the lounging rooms and the acquaintances he might make there.

Sneed had risen and was pacing the floor with short, jerky steps, but turned at his re-entrance.

"What am I to do?" he demanded for the second time. "You people have had three days in which to find Raeburn and force him to cease his persecution, but you have done nothing! You have twenty-four hours left and if you fail now he will carry out his threat, for I know the scoundrel well enough to be convinced that he means what he says!"

"You forget that we were working in the dark, Mr. Sneed," Cliff observed quietly. "Had you been frank

with us from the start you might have been spared the annoyance of this second letter. If Raeburn follows the logical course and goes to the authorities with his story he can only claim that your daughter is being kept in restraint against her will and demand that you produce her in court. You can then have him bound over to keep the peace, but of course, the notoriety—”

“If I had desired legal advice I should have consulted my attorney for it!” Sneed interrupted in a squeak of exasperation. “Raeburn would no more go to the authorities and risk injuring her by having my poor daughter’s infirmity dragged into the limelight than I would. He’s the type of man who settles his own scores and he can ruin me in other ways, I tell you!”

“You have not told us!” Cliff retorted. “If we do locate Raeburn within the time limit which he has set what do you propose that we shall do with him, Mr. Sneed?—Kidnap him? We do not guarantee to our clients any services which are beyond the pale of the law, you know!”

“You can at least detain him and let me know.” The old man had regained a partial control of himself and he spoke slowly as though weighing each word. “A representative of mine will take him off your hands and persuade him of the futility of his attempts to coerce me and blight my poor Eva’s already clouded life by intruding in it again. Do you think that I, Phineas Sneed, would descend to anything unlawful, sir!”

A sudden memory flashed across Cliff’s mind of the

hapless 'Gull' and his lawyer's assertion that he had been framed, but he checked the impulse to put the thought into speech.

"I am insinuating nothing, Mr. Sneed," he responded noncommittally. "You have seriously hampered our efforts on your behalf by your previous reticence, and now you tell me that it lies within Raeburn's power to ruin you in other ways unconnected with your daughter. In the event that we do not succeed in finding him before the twenty-four hours have passed, we must be prepared to circumvent him. I would suggest that you direct Robert to leave all your window shades up tomorrow and then wait for the further instructions which he promises; whether or not your daughter is in his hands already, it can do no harm to temporize with him. What is the nature of the power which he holds over you to ruin you?"

"It—it is a private issue of a financial nature connected with my former operations in Wall Street," Sneed stammered. "I told you that prior to my daughter's unfortunate meeting with Raeburn I had known him casually in connection with a deal in mining stock here. The ring with which he was affiliated defied me and I broke it up. My methods were legal enough, but Raeburn had learned certain details which, if he chose to lay them before the members of that ring would cause a—a far-reaching scandal. He knew it and that was why he dared to aspire to my daughter's hand, and why I thought it advisable to have that South African proposition put up to him.

Do you understand now, Mr. Nichols? I have been perfectly frank with you—”

“Not entirely, Mr. Sneed.” The voice which interrupted came from behind them and both turned to find Phil standing in the aperture leading to the outer office. “I hurried back, hoping to catch you here, for there is a question or two that I should like to ask you.”

“You have news for me, Mr. Howe?” the old man cried eagerly. “You have located my daughter?”

“Not yet.” Phil shook his head and reached for the letter which Cliff silently held out to him. “So it has come to a showdown, has it?” He commented as he read. “So much the better.—Let’s see the envelope. Humph! No numbers on it this time!”

“‘Numbers?’” repeated Sneed, his thin voice rising once more. “Do you mean those about which you asked me when you called on Sunday?”

“Yes. You see, we knew what they meant even if you did not. O-four-two-six was the prison number of a convict who had formerly been in your employ.”

“A convict—in my employ—! Impossible!” Sneed exclaimed, but he moistened his lips with his tongue and one hand fumbled at his withered throat as though his collar were suddenly constricting him. “Robert and Jane are the only two—”

“I am referring now to the man who installed the safe in your apartment, Mr. Sneed.” There was a savagely resentful note in Phil’s tone, but he conquered it and went on coldly: “The only thing you invented about that was

the story you told us of the 'Frenchman' who built it for you."

"What do you mean—?" Sneed attempted to bluster, but his reedy voice died in his throat.

"We knew the minute we laid eyes on that safe who the real inventor was!" Phil pursued, heedless of a cautioning glance from Cliff. "Only one man in the world had worked out that system of leverage and control, and he meant it for a different purpose. How did you get hold of Arthur Wicks in the first place, Mr. Sneed, and what part had you—?"

"You may not know that the young man later got into trouble and was sent to prison for a term of years." Cliff broke in swiftly in suave explanation which yet held a warning for his indiscreet associate. "The fact that an attempt was made to enter your safe, of which he alone had the secret, within a few days of your receipt of the first anonymous letter, and that while it was supposedly written at Raeburn's instigation, Arthur Wick's prison number was marked upon the envelope argued a connection between the two for which no coincidence could account."

"That is impossible!" Sneed caught his breath and for an instant a look of sheer terror gleamed in his eyes. "I was astonished when the young man turned out to be a criminal, for I had thought him as honest as he was clever, but one can never tell when the half-cracked brain of an inventor will take a crooked turn. I heard of the case, of course, and that was why I dissembled when you persisted in asking me about my safe for I did not wish you to fly

off at a tangent and waste precious time since I already knew who was responsible for the letter, and that there could be no collusion between Raeburn, adventurer as he is, and a wretched convict!"

"I cannot yet comprehend why you did not at least tell us Raeburn's name," Cliff remarked hastily as he saw signs of renewed storm in Phil's face. "You must have realized that we would learn it eventually when we discovered him."

"I could not do so without entering into explanations which would have involved my daughter, and I hoped to take him off your hands before you found that he was anything but a dangerous crank." A dull flush had mounted to their client's brow. "I would have striven to the last to keep the knowledge of her infirmity even from you, gentlemen; to keep the fact that I had such a daughter a secret from all the world. I cannot understand about those numbers having been written upon the envelope, but it must have been mere accident, coincidence, even though it seems almost impossible. Are you sure—sure that the numbers are the same?"

He added the question with an eager anxiety that was ill-concealed, but Phil returned in a hard voice:

"Absolutely. There's no mistake about it, Mr. Sneed, and the percentage against those four figures on the envelope forming Wicks' prison number just by accident is too great to be thought of for a minute. Now I want to know without any more beating about the bush how you came across him and all that you can tell me about him."

Meanwhile, in the servants' sitting-room of Sneed's apartment, George was engaged in one of the most tedious efforts of his career. Old Robert's agitation of the morning had given place to a numbed lethargy of mind and spirit and it was only with the utmost patience that a statement of any sort could be drawn from him.

"My wife, sir?" he repeatedly absently after reiterated questioning. "I haven't the least notion. She was strong-willed, Jane was, and she always did what she wanted to without a word to me. I couldn't say where she might have gone, sir."

"Has she any relatives here in the city, Robert?"

"A cousin or two, maybe. It seems to me I've heard her speak of them now and again but I never saw them. It's years since she's had a letter from home, sir."

"And where is her home, Robert? Where did she come from?" George urged, but gently, for when he pressed a point too sternly the old man appeared to lose what little power of coherent response remained to him.

"Jane?" He raised his shaking hand to his forehead. "Why, Jane's English, of course, sir. She comes from a little place outside of Liverpool. I—I can't just remember the name of it.—Let me see—!"

"Never mind the place now," George interrupted. "Did you meet her there in England?"

"Me, sir? I've never been out of America in my life! I married Jane off a ship, sir." He looked up in naive surprise at the question.

"A ship?" His interrogator repeated pertinaciously.

"What do you mean, Robert? What sort of a ship and what was she doing on board?"

"An ocean liner, sir. Jane was a stewardess and a fine figure of a woman, younger than me by nearly twenty years. She could have done better for herself, but I had a little money laid by and Jane was always one to look out for the future."

"Then she didn't make you spend your savings?"

"No, sir. It's all banked in her name, every penny of it."

"How much have you saved, Robert, and where is it banked?" George put the question in an off-hand manner, but he watched the old man's face narrowly and saw the quick look of belated caution which passed over it before it settled once more into a dazed, expressionless mask.

"I don't know, sir. It was two or three thousand—I forget just how much—that I turned over to Jane when I married her, and I've been giving her my wages, regular as clock-work, ever since. We must have a good bit laid by, but I don't know what bank she put it in; I did know, but she'd get a notion to change about and my memory isn't as good as it was."

"How long have you been married?"

"A long time, sir. Fifteen years and more, and I was getting on in years then; past fifty."

"What was your wife's name?"

"Anthony, sir. Jane Anthony, though I haven't thought of it in many a day." His faded eyes blinked and he added quaveringly: "I sha'n't hardly know what to do

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now she's gone, nor how to manage, for she is a masterful kind and long ago I learned to leave everything in her hands."

"Then you don't think she's coming back?" he seized upon the advantage. "Why do you think I left you, Robert?"

"I couldn't say, sir. Of course, she might come any time." His voice had steadied, but he spoke a little callously as though he entertained small hope of possibility.

"Do you think she went away because Mr. Sneed's daughter had escaped from her care?"

"I don't know, sir; she didn't say. She didn't say anything." He picked tremblingly at the black cloth which covered his sharp, old knees. "We were talking all night about the young lady and wondering what she could have got to, and in the morning Jane was gone."

"What did Miss Sneed wear when you saw her through the kitchen yesterday on her way out?"

"I didn't notice, sir. It was one of those light-colored dresses of hers,—blue, I think—and she had a light scarf over her shoulders. Jane could have told you more than me; it was she took care of the young lady and obeyed Mr. Sneed's orders."

It was the old refrain of that morning's interview. Robert repeated it almost mechanically, his dull eyes fixed on space.

"And it was by Mr. Sneed's orders that you a

wife never went out together, but one of you always remained at home?" George asked, working back again to the principal subject of his inquiry.

"Yes, sir; to keep watch over the young lady."

"If your wife had no relatives in or near the city whom she visited when she went out, to whom did she go? Who were her friends?"

Robert glanced up in a bewildered fashion at his questioner and once more passed his hand across his forehead.

"Well, sir, there was the widow of a head steward Jane had worked with, a Mrs. Ferris. She lives up in the Bronx, in a house called the 'Wandsworth' and Jane spends the day with her now and then. Of course, us not going out together and allowed no callers here in the five years past, we've not got the same friends any more, but there used to be a pretty, red-haired girl came here a lot to see Jane."

"'A red-haired girl?'" repeated George. "Do you remember her name, Robert?"

"Yes, sir. I mightn't have, for it's two years and more since Jane mentioned her, but she got a letter from her only yesterday morning. It's Peterson, Carrie Peterson."

George did not betray by the slightest change of expression the surprise which the repetition of that name from such an unexpected quarter brought to him, and his voice showed only mild interest as he asked:

"What was in the letter, Robert? What did this Carrie Peterson say?"

"I don't know, sir. Jane don't get many letters and

when I gave her that one from the morning's mail she said: 'Why, it's from Carrie!' before ever she opened the envelope. When she read it she just clapped her lips together and said never another word but stuck the letter in the front of her dress, and I saw her tearing it to bits in the kitchen a little later."

"Didn't you ask her what was in it?" demanded George, exasperation for once dominating his tones, but the old man shook his head.

"It would have done no good, sir. When Jane got that look on her face you might as well have talked to a stone image! I—I fooled her, though! I've not had time to put them together yet, but I saved some of the pieces after she tore up the letter!" His eyes crinkled at the corners and a sly, senile cackle issued from his lips. "Jane's a smart one, but it isn't the first time I've got the best of her!"

"You're nobody's fool, Robert!" George chuckled as though in enjoyment of the joke and added confidentially: "You go and get the pieces and we'll put them together ourselves! Two heads are better than one, you know, and we'll find out what that Peterson girl wrote that your wife wouldn't tell you!"

Robert's eyes darted to a small, plain desk in the corner and he braced his hands on the arms of his chair to rise. Then slowly the mirthful look died out of his face and he sank back again, shaking his head.

"I—I lost the pieces, sir; I was just hunting for them when you came." He spoke in a hurried, tremulous tone.

"In the excitement this morning after I found Jane was gone I forgot where I put them yesterday."

"Never mind." George raised his head suddenly. "What was that? Didn't you hear a bell ringing somewhere?"

This time the old man started from his chair as though galvanized.

"I didn't, sir, but I'm getting hard of hearing. Maybe it's Mr. Sneed come home—!"

Without another word he shambled from the room and when he returned a few minutes later after a fruitless quest he found his questioner standing idly by the desk.

"I don't understand it, sir." He shook his head. "There's nobody here,—that is, not in Mr. Sneed's own apartments."

"I must have been mistaken," George observed genially, moving so as to keep himself between Robert's line of vision and the rifled desk. "Will you get my hat and stick please? I must hurry back to the office now, but you won't forget to let us know the minute your wife returns?"

"No, sir." Robert's tone was listless once more as he turned to lead the way. "I won't forget if—if Jane comes back."

CHAPTER XV

THE OPEN WIRE

“**W**HAT do you think of it?” It was an hour later and, Sneed having departed, George, together with Phil and Cliff were bending over some torn fragments of paper spread out on the desk in the latter’s study.

“It’s worse than one of those kid puzzles!” Phil grumbled. “Jane sure made a thorough job of it when she tore up the letter! There’s hardly a word left whole and none of the edges seem to match so that it will read like sense. Why didn’t the old fool get it all while he was about it!”

“Wait a bit, Phil.” Cliff was patiently moving the pieces about to try to fit them together. “Here’s something, anyway.—’arks are after Da’, and the line just below it is: ‘hop in a hurry. Co—.’”

“Do you call that sense?” snorted Phil. “The words are torn off at each end—!”

“Exactly!” Cliff interrupted. “None of the other pieces seem to fit on either side, but knowing that the girl lived with her father we can assume that ‘Da—’ means ‘Dad’, and ‘Co—’ starting a sentence might very well be ‘Come’. This would take care of that side.”

“It sounds good,” Phil admitted grudgingly. “But there haven’t been any arks since Noah, and who is going to

'hop in a hurry'? Not Jane, from the flash I got of her!"

"Put an 'n' before 'arks' and an 's' before 'hop', and you'll find that the narks are after Dad, and they've had to shut up shop in a hurry."

"'Narks,'" Phil repeated. "That's what the Gull used to call a dick or plainclothes bull! It's English, isn't it?"

"In certain circles," Cliff responded as he fitted two more fragments deftly together and then frowned. "Here is another bit:—'tage on Shady La—' and then underneath, —'oney, no risk for y—'."

"Good Lord, that's plain enough!" George broke in. "Red Jim and his daughter have vamoosed to the country somewhere, 'Shady Lake' or 'Shady Lane', and it must be near the suburbs or they couldn't expect Jane to come to them. That's what they want, you see; the girl is putting up some sort of a proposition to her. The second line must read: 'money, no risk for you'."

"Jane was a stewardess on a liner and Red Jim did a stretch for smuggling!" Phil exclaimed, bringing his hand down so smartly on the desk top that the bits of paper fluttered. "She must have been in on the game with them, and what is more if she was Carrie's friend and Carrie was the Gull's girl, it is easy to figure out how he happened to go to Sneed with his invention, though the old guy wouldn't tell us himself!"

"You faced him with that lie about the dying Frenchman who installed the safe for him?" George asked quickly.

"Only a little while before you came back." Phil nodded.

"He admitted the truth but insisted that the Gull came to him of his own accord, having heard of him as a retired millionaire, to induce him to finance the Super-swing, but Sneed had seen the possibilities of the invention being turned to his own account and had given the Gull a large sum to install the safe. I thought, of course, that crook of a lawyer, Hodge, had sent the Gull to the old man for the job, but he may have heard of him through Jane.—What have you got there?"

George had picked up two of the torn pieces of paper idly while he listened and now he held the jagged edges together in triumph.

"Listen to this:—'unch of spark', and 'old Schramek on'. The message is about a bunch of sparklers! There must be some class to your friend Red Jim if he's taken to diamond smuggling!"

"And Schramek is the cleverest fence in the business; does a regular trade with a crooked crowd over in Amsterdam!" Cliff exclaimed. "This is all mighty interesting, but it isn't getting you fellows any closer to locating Jane. If she has beaten it away because Sneed's daughter escaped she would be too wise to take refuge with people who thought they were wanted themselves, especially if she has ever been mixed up in their game.—Hello! Here's a piece of the envelope. See the corner of the stamp, and—?"

"And the postmark!" Phil seized upon. "'K-e-r-s' in the half circle above, then 'p.m.' and below is 'Y.' The date doesn't show but it must have been mailed on Sunday

evening since Jane got it yesterday morning. It's up to George to hunt down that widow he told us about—Ferris was her name, wasn't it?—and try to get a line on Jane, but I'm off to *Yonkers* to look up a cottage on Shady Lane!"

At approximately the moment of his precipitate departure Gideon Ormsby and the millionaire thread manufacturer, Waldo Palliser, were seated together in the corner of the smoking-room of an exclusive uptown hotel deep in a discussion of the stock market, when a slight, aristocratic-looking man appeared in the doorway and stood for a moment stroking his small, blond mustache and gazing somewhat irresolutely about him.

"By Jove, there's that chap Ballantyne!" exclaimed Ormsby. "Saw him dining the other night with old Phineas Sneed. Let's have him over; interesting sort of fellow, Wally, you'll like him."

In answer to the cordially beckoning hand Lucian gave a well-bred start and then after an obviously puzzled moment allowed an expression of pleased recognition to steal over his face as he came forward, not too quickly, and bowed.

"How do you do, Mr. Ormsby? Fancy your remembering me!" He shook hands and, acknowledging the introduction to Palliser which followed, he seated himself in the chair Ormsby drew forward. "I thought I saw you last Sunday evening dining with an engineer named

Holton, who is known to me by reputation, and another chap, but I was not sure."

"And you were with Mr. Sneed." Ormsby laughed. "Has he succeeded in interesting you in that collection of his? Palliser has been telling me about it."

"The—er—weapons?" Luce smiled deprecatingly. "He has a Renaissance dagger and one or two examples of workmanship of a later period that are really worth while, but I fancy he values the rest more from the rather gruesome histories connected with them than from any other standpoint. The collection is unique in its way, but our discussion at dinner was a sordid one; I had asked his advice about a new mining stock which is being put on the market very soon. I hear it is rather a good thing."

"New company?" Palliser pricked up his ears.

"Yes. A friend of mine knows the young engineer who is back of the organization, a chap named Raymond or Raynor," Luce explained artlessly.

"Raeburn. I know him." Palliser nodded. "Told you and that friend of yours, Randolph Pinckney, last Saturday out at the country club that Raeburn stands to clean up on this, Gid.—What did Sneed think about it, Mr. Ballantyne, if that isn't an indiscreet question?"

"Not at all!" Luce drew out his cigarette case and proffered it. "As a matter of fact I do not believe that Mr. Sneed has been keeping in touch with the market lately. He appeared to have heard no rumors of this new company and advised me rather strongly against what he termed 'wildcat propositions'."

"This isn't one. I think it's pretty sound." Ormsby lighted his cigarette and watched the smoke curl upward. "I didn't know you dabbled in my game, Mr. Ballantyne."

"Oh, I play about in it occasionally," Luce replied with a nonchalant air. "Our lawmakers have tied up our former diversions so stringently that one is positively driven to Wall Street for a bit of excitement. My friend had promised to bring this young engineer—Raeburn is his name?—here this afternoon to meet me and I was looking about for them when you saw me."

"I called up Raeburn myself this morning but he had already left the hotel," Palliser observed. "I'll try the Engineers' Club later, for I want him to come out to my place for the week-end if he can get away."

"The hotel?" Luce raised his eyebrows slightly. "I thought my friend said he had rooms somewhere."

"No. He's at the Belmonde," Palliser responded carelessly. "He knows our mutual friend Sneed, too, but between you and me I don't believe there is much love lost between them!"

Ormsby laughed.

"I guess more than a few people have slept easier o' nights since Phineas Sneed retired!" he remarked. "He was the leader of the wolf-pack in his day; it is difficult to realize that he is out of the game for good."

"I don't believe he is," dissented Palliser. "He may have retired but I'd wager he takes a flyer now and then. It was over some mining stock, I understand, that he and

Raeburn fell out a few years ago. It is a wonder he didn't mention it, Mr. Ballantyne, for he is a good hater!"

"I know Mr. Sneed very slightly." Luce dropped his cigarette into the ash-tray at his side. "Our acquaintanceship was based primarily on our mutual interest in curios, although I must confess that my taste runs more to objects of art and beauty.—By the way, Mr. Ormsby, did your aunt ever recover her ruby cross?"

He turned in bland inquiry to Gideon, nor betrayed by the flicker of an eyelash the whimsical remembrance which had flashed across his mind, that the very cigarette case which he had proffered a few minutes before had been purchased from part of the proceeds of that bauble's discreet sale.

"Never. It served her right for not depositing it with the purser!" Gideon Ormsby laughed. "Not leaving us, Mr. Ballantyne?"

"I must, I am afraid." Luce spoke with just the right shade of regret as he rose. "Like you, Mr. Palliser, my friend was probably unable to locate Mr. Raeburn, and I have an appointment. Please convey my respects to your aunt, Mr. Ormsby, and tell her I am deeply sorry about her ruby cross."

He took his leave of them and walked unhurriedly from the smoking-room, but once out of their range of vision in the lobby he hastened from the hotel and jumped into the first taxi.

"The Belmonde, quick!" he directed and then leaned back as the cab started and careened around the corner.

He had small hope of running his quarry to earth there but it was barely possible that Raeburn had left a clue behind him as to his next move.

What Luce had not expected to encounter, however, was a glimpse of Rex Powell turning away from the desk of the Belmonde as he entered, and abruptly changing his course he followed his friend past the tea room to the lounge.

"What luck, Rex?" He spoke in a subdued tone as he laid his hand upon the other's arm. "I didn't expect to find you here before me."

Rex darted a quick glance about and led the way to a davenport at one side of the wide corridor.

"Our trails met, didn't they, old man?" He laughed somewhat ruefully. "Much good it will do us! I take it that you located Ormsby with Palliser? He told me of that appointment when I phoned him; that was why I suggested that you put in an appearance on the chance that he would recognize you and ask you to join them. He seemed quite keen on renewing his acquaintance with you when he saw you and Sneed the other night."

"It worked," Luce responded briefly. "Your friend Palliser informed me, after being led adroitly to the point, that Raeburn was staying here and I left them as soon as I decently could, but I suppose our bird has flown?"

Rex nodded.

"He checked out just before noon but asked to have his mail held, saying that he would return next week. That is a stall, of course, but I've picked up two rather curious

bits of information, either of which may lead to results. I hadn't just arrived when you saw me turning away from the desk; I went back to leave a note with the clerk for Raeburn should he return, but I've been doing a little investigating in my own way for the last half-hour. He told the cab starter to have the taxi take him to the Grand Central Station when he left, but I found the chauffeur who drove it and he says Raeburn changed his mind and had himself rushed to the Pennsylvania instead. He had so much hand luggage with him that it took two porters there to carry it and some of it was so unusual in appearance that they may be able to remember him."

"You'll probably find that unusual luggage of his in the check-room of the station," Luce remarked sagely. "There isn't much of a lead in that, for unless he has Sneed's daughter hidden somewhere in the suburbs there is no likelihood of his leaving town. The chances are that he walked out again five minutes after he got there, and disappeared in the crowd."

"Perhaps." Rex smiled and went on: "It is worth trying out, anyway, and I think I'll take the same taxi over to the station now, on a chance that the chauffeur might be able to pick out one of the porters."

"How did you make out with Holten the engineer?" asked Luce. "It was he who gave you Raeburn's address here, wasn't it?"

"Yes. He wouldn't talk much, but it appears that he nursed Raeburn through a pretty bad attack of fever down in Africa a couple of years ago and I am under the im-

pression that in his delirium our young friend babbled a lot more than he realizes now. He railed against some man who was his bitter enemy but he evidently didn't mention a name for I read between the lines that Holten hasn't any idea it was Sneed. I asked him if he had ever heard of insanity in Raeburn's family and he was surprised into blurting out that Raeburn had raved now and then about someone going mad. Holten is not a cad and he shut up like a clam when he realized that he was giving away another man's secrets, so I changed the subject quickly." Rex paused and added: "It is all corroborative, you see, but the odd part of it is that Holten likes him, and he seems to be a rather keen judge of human nature. Raeburn must be a pretty slick article in spite of George's opinion."

Luce rose reluctantly.

"Well, I've drawn a blank, at any rate," he said gloomily. "I'd better get back to the office and see if Phil has anything on for me."

"You haven't heard the second bit of information I picked up." Rex darted a quizzical glance at his companion. "There is a henna-haired goddess at the telephone exchange to your left as you come in the main entrance here who is inclined to say more than 'Number, please?' and 'Busy!' if you give her half a chance, and I shouldn't wonder if she is hungry at dinner-time, like any other healthy young woman."

"Heavens, Rex!" Luce protested feebly as they moved

off together toward the lobby. "I'm neither a college boy now, nor an old rounder—!"

"Not if you could get a line on Raeburn?" Rex interrupted slyly. "He had some rather curious phone calls this morning, I imagine. I didn't inquire too closely into the matter for I thought I would try the young lady out if I ran into an impasse at the station, but we can save time if we each follow a lead. Go and ask for a long distance call, jolly her along, get her some roses at the flower stand and take her out to dinner. Don't mention Raeburn until you have a promising little flirtation well started, and I think you may learn something interesting."

"All right, I suppose I must take her on." There was resignation in Luce's tone, but he added firmly: "I warn you, though, that if she parks her gum under the table or smears herself with a lip stick in public I shall leave her flat!"

However, Miss Mabel Kerrigan was guilty of neither of these social solecisms. Her rather full lips required no artificial coloring and her round, blue eyes appraised Luce in frank but friendly fashion when, an unsuccessful effort to connect with a wholly fictitious person in Kansas City having paved the way to acquaintanceship, he proffered his roses and his invitation to dine.

"My, they've got longer stems than those that come for that there movie actress on the tenth floor!" she exclaimed as she buried her nose in the mass of fragrant blooms. "You don't care what you do with your money, do you? They're just grand!"

"Then you will take pity on a lonesome stranger and come and dine with me, won't you?" Luce urged, his artistic soul shuddering at the spectacle of that mahogany-red hair in juxtaposition with the purplish-crimson petals. "When I'm home they call me—er—Lawrence, and I'm warranted not to bite."

"I'm proof against hydrophobia!" she laughed. "Just lead little Mabel Kerrigan where there's good jazz dance music and the eats won't poison her, and she'll be ready at seven, Lawrence.—Twenty cents, Madam! There are two charges on that call!"

At half-past eight in the most garish of Broadway restaurants Miss Kerrigan sat back in her chair with a sigh of repletion and Luce gazed at her in admiring awe. Never outside a zoo could he have thought to encounter such an appetite, and between courses she had led him determinedly through the tottering, wriggling intricacies of the Chicago with an energy which left him limp and dizzy.

"Don't let's dance any more just now. I'm too full," she declared naively, to his infinite relief. Then with a glance at the wilted rag which had once been his immaculate collar she added commiseratingly: "I don't guess the new steps have reached Boston yet."

"'Boston?'" he repeated wonderingly, off guard.

Miss Kerrigan smiled.

"It's the only burg on this side of the map where that there fake British accent is hand-cultivated.—Now, don't get sore, Lawrence—!"

"I'm not. I'm admiring you, Mabel." Luce spoke truly. "You have very discerning ears."

"At the Belmonde we get 'em from every state in the Union and you soon learn to tell." She tossed her head sagely. "I got fooled once when I first went to work there by an English Lord,—a blond, pink-faced, fine-looking feller. He had me going so that I charged up his long distance till I wised myself up that there was something queer about the conversations, even for the nobility, and I put a crimp in that little graft. The management got stung worse than I did when he beat it owing a six weeks bill and it turned out he was just a con. man.—You meet up with some funny propositions in a big hotel."

"I should think you must." Luce was searching his mind for an opening for the real business of the evening. "I fancy some of the most commonplace looking people you see are up to the most extraordinary games and it must be rare sport to listen in.—Oh, don't be angry, Mabel. Everybody does that, I know; it's part of the game."

"But I don't!" she protested indignantly, then dimpled. "At least, not often, only when I get kind of interested in somebody and see that something is happening to them. It's no harm, for they never know. There's a feller left the hotel all of a sudden today—"

She checked herself but Luce was looking out over the jiggling figures on the dance floor, and after a full minute he asked idly:

"What about the chap? Did he do the management, too?"

"I should say not! He was a regular feller, big and breezy and on the level, but he had a look in his eyes like a little boy who'd been punished for something he hadn't done. I noticed it when he first came two weeks ago and I says to myself: 'that there guy has got a secret sorrow!' I'm no Elinor Glyn, but you learn things at the switch-board sometimes that folks wouldn't hang out on the line Monday mornings, and what I hear over the wire between kicks against the service would make any love story read like an almanac! This here feller was always polite and kind of shy, but he didn't lamp me no more than if I was part of the 'phone company's installation and I made up my mind some girl must have give him a rotten throw. I noticed after two or three days that somebody rang him up pretty regular every evening,—I was night operator that week,—and if they was late he wouldn't stay in his room but come down and hang around my desk to wait. I got to wondering about it and finally I listened in, but it was only an old man talking, so I didn't bother any more. This here old man,—he spoke respectful, like he was an employee—kept calling up, though, and every day I saw that there young feller getting more gloomy-looking and sore, too, till his eyes just seemed to burn me up! If it hadn't been for the set of his jaw and the swing of his shoulders I'd have been almost afraid the chambermaid would 'phone down some morning that she couldn't get no answer and for the house detective to come and break in the door!"

"Suicide?" Luce arched his eyebrows and spoke in a

tone of half-bored interest. "You don't get much of that sort of thing in a place like the Belmonde, do you?"

"Not often, thank heavens!" Miss Kerrigan shuddered. "But this here young feller I was telling you about: nobody else 'phoned him except a couple of gentlemen and then he was always out. One of them called this morning just after he'd gone,—I'm on day duty now, of course,—and I said he wouldn't be in till afternoon, anyway, having learned his habits, but an hour afterwards in he comes. He makes straight for my desk and he looked like he'd put his last dollar on a crooked tip; not down and out, but fighting mad. He said he was expecting a very important call and would I be sure to connect with the right room number, and I says to myself I'd get in on that there call, too, if I had to cut off everyone else in the house.—I suppose you think it was perfectly terrible of me—!"

"Not at all," Luce assured her. "Just natural curiosity, and you've made me curious, too. What happened? Was the conversation worth while listening in on?"

"Was it?" she echoed. "I'll say it was! I thought at first it wouldn't be, for it was just that there old man again. He says: 'You left word for me to call you, sir?' Number nine-forty—that's this here young man,—says: 'Yes. You're 'phoning from the usual place? That hound has hired outside help to do me in, but we'll beat him yet! You know what we sent him last week? We're going to send him another, now, since that didn't work!'—Believe me when I heard that I could feel the prickles coming out all over me, thinking it was a bomb he meant, and I

wouldn't be surprise if it was! The old man was kind of upset, too, and he says: 'Oh, sir, do you think it's safe?' Nine-forty laughed like he didn't care and says: 'It's him or me',—only he says 'he or I—now. I'll give him till tomorrow night, and then I'll settle the score!'—Honest it was as good as one of these here crook plays, only nine-forty isn't no crook! The old man repeats slow and real faint over the wire, like he was talking to himself: 'Tomorrow night'. Nine-forty says: 'Meet me in twenty minutes, same place as before. This time we won't send it through the mails, we'll plant it right at his door. You're with me to the finish?' The old man says kind of solemn: 'And beyond, sir!' Nine-forty says: 'I knew it, old scout! In twenty minutes'. Then he rung off. I remember every word like it was rubber-stamped on my mind and I'll tell the world that the way I plugged in wrong numbers for the next hour or two was a caution! You can bet I'm going to watch the papers day after tomorrow and see if anybody gets blown up!"

"And this young man has left the hotel for good?" Luce asked. "What time did that conversation take place, do you remember?"

"I looked," Miss Kerrigan replied briefly. "It was just past ten. I watched the lobby and saw him go out right away. He was back in an hour, but he 'phoned down to the desk for his bill, and said he had been suddenly called away but would be back next week,—I listened in again,—and within half an hour he was gone. Funny, isn't it?—My Gawd! Look at the time, and me living in Flatbush!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE SHADOWS LOSE A CLIENT

“**Y**OU betcha I’ve got something to report!” Henry spoke with marked emphasis in response to Rex’s query. It was early the following morning and the latter had been discussing the latest phases of the case with Luce and Cliff when the medical expert of the organization put in an appearance. There was an excited gleam in his eye and a harassed look upon his broad, usually placid countenance. “I haven’t felt much sympathy for our client until now, but by George, I pity him! No wonder it took padded walls and a strong-arm Lizzie to look after that daughter of his, crazy or not!”

“What’s the matter?” asked Cliff.

Henry plumped down into a chair and ran his handkerchief over the dome-like expanse of his bald head.

“Ethel is the matter!” he groaned. “Am I or am I not in charge of that girl?”

“Why? What has she done?” Luce smiled. “I suppose you are nominally in charge of her, but—”

“Aha!” Henry exploded with unconscious but fervent melodrama. “‘But!’ You said it! She’s taken the bit in her teeth, that’s what, and right from the start, too! The next time she needs an uncle, somebody else will be the goat!”

"Well, she is there to conduct an independent investigation, you know," Rex remarked defensively.

"She's doing it!" Henry produced a cigar and bit off the end with unnecessary vigor. "She's making medicine, all right!"

"Has she discovered anything?" Cliff demanded. "She hasn't reported since she 'phoned your message to us yesterday."

"My message!" exclaimed Henry, the flaming match poised in air. "What the devil do you mean? I didn't send you any message!"

"You didn't get her to 'phone me yesterday afternoon just a few minutes after Sneed arrived, to tell me to hold him here as long as I could?" insisted Cliff.

"I didn't give a whoop where Sneed was!—Ouch!" Henry dropped the match and regarded his thumb and forefinger tenderly. "Did she have the nerve to 'phone you in my name?"

"She said her, uncle, Doctor Carter, had asked her to do so."

"That's how I'm registered. Great snakes! What will she do next?"

"What has she done so far?" Rex demanded with a shade of impatience in his tone.

"Oh, nothing! Nothing at all!" Henry laughed bitterly. "Just made me a laughing-stock around the hotel, that's all! Rube uncle used as a fall guy by wisenheimer niece! She's burned herself, too, and she won't tell me how, or come up to my sitting-room and let me dress it for her—!"

"Ethel hurt!" cried Rex. "Why didn't you say so before! Is it very bad? Good Lord, if we have sent that child into any possible danger—!"

"It's not so bad that she couldn't go shopping this morning with two hundred dollars of my expense money!" Henry's tone was grim. "I can understand her extravagance and ordering everything on the menu, for I suppose the poor kid has never been in a swell place like the Burlingame before, but why won't she eat with me in the restaurant? I tell you it's going to look queer in the hotel! A fine visit I'm supposed to be having with my niece! She patted my head right in the lobby this morning just after she'd relieved me of the two centuries, and even that pompous old clerk grinned!"

"If her appetite is anything like one I encountered last night she'll burst in a week!" Luce prophesied darkly. "I should have thought she would like the restaurant."

"Ethel isn't there for a good time and she is well aware of it; don't make any mistake about her," asserted Rex. "She is acting on her own initiative, as usual, but whatever she does has a definite purpose behind it."

"Then why won't she take me into her confidence?" Henry succeeded in lighting his cigar and sat back in his chair puffing aggrievedly. "I don't know what she is going to do from one minute to another, and how can I play up to her if she keeps me in the dark? I managed to get a room and bath for her directly below Sneed's apartment, between the entrance to his private hall and a linen-room, while my own suite is just down the corridor, and I ar-

ranged for us both to have the same room waiter that he has, too. It is lucky I did, or I couldn't have got on to the fact that Ethel has something up her sleeve quite so quick. After we had registered and were settled we had lunch together in the main dining-room and then I fooled around the lobby all the afternoon, as you told me to, while she went up to Sneed's apartment. When dinner-time came and she didn't make any effort to communicate with me I telephoned to her room but she said she wasn't feeling well and would have her dinner upstairs. I asked her if she would come to my sitting-room afterward but she said 'no', and I knew from her tone that she was up to some mischief. I decided to have my own dinner up in my suite so that I could get acquainted with the room waiter and question him, and when I opened up on him his face was a study!"

"I found him an inscrutable old chap and I suspect he is rather more shrewd than that subservient manner of his would indicate," Luce observed. "I hope you were guarded in your questioning, Henry."

"I merely asked him if he had served my niece,—mentioning her room number,—and if she had had everything she required, and he replied that he *thought* so. His tone was respectful enough but it was emphatic, and he handed me the two chits she had signed, one for tea and the other for dinner. She'd had a regular feast at tea-time—no wonder she said she didn't feel well afterwards!—but at dinner she had sampled every course on the menu, nevertheless!"

"She is not going to let anything get by her, is she?" Cliff laughed and then his face sobered. "But when did she burn herself?"

"Some time during the afternoon. The first I heard of it was from the waiter when I handed those signed restaurant cards back to him; he remarked that he hoped the young lady's hands would be better in the morning," Henry responded. "He's an old busybody, if you ask me! He dawdled about as if he expected I was going to ask him about *that* but I wasn't letting on it was news to me. As soon as I got rid of him, though, I 'phoned to her room again but she laughed it off and said it was nothing, that she would tell me about it in the morning. She didn't, however. It was the same old thing, breakfast in her room, but she 'phoned that she would meet me in the lobby in half an hour. When she did she was dressed for the street but both her hands were bandaged and she calmly gave me to understand that I was to mind my own business! I realized then that was why she met me in the lobby instead of coming to my sitting-room, so that she would have me at a disadvantage and I couldn't insist on her going into details. The publicity didn't feaze her, though, or hinder her from asking baldly for the two hundred for 'a few little things she needed!'"

"She must have burned herself accidentally some way in Sneed's kitchen, and she probably didn't care to appear in the main dining-room with bandaged hands, or else, like you, she wanted an opportunity to sound the room waiter," Rex hazarded. "I cannot understand about Ethel's need

of money, however; I gave her a hundred yesterday for expenses on the case and it should have been more than enough for incidentals, unless she has taken it on herself to bribe someone. She assured me that she had all the clothes she would require for a stay of a few days at the hotel.—Did you make any acquaintances yourself among the guests?”

“Only a couple of gouty old codgers and neither of them seemed to know Sneed. I didn’t want to seem too curious about him, but I smoked a cigar after breakfast with the retired head of a life insurance company that carries Sneed’s policy. I am going to play billiards with him this afternoon and see what information I can pick up from that source.” Henry dropped the stub of his cigar in the ash-tray and heaved himself out of his chair. “I’d better be getting back to the hotel now, for I’m going to waylay that young woman when she returns from that shopping expedition of hers and make her come clean. Is there any news from Phil?”

“Not since yesterday when he started for Yonkers, still on the trail of that red-haired girl of the Gull’s,” Cliff returned. “She is a friend of that missing servant Jane, it seems, so Phil isn’t shooting so wide of the mark, after all, in his determination to locate her. Tell Ethel to report when she has an opportunity.”

Henry had scarcely taken his departure when George entered. An added lugubriousness seemed to ride upon his long face and he shook his head gloomily in response to Rex’s eager questions.

"I've seen Mrs. Ferris, the widow of a ship's steward whom Robert said was his wife's oldest friend, and I have some news but it won't take us very far. She's a stout, comfortable, jolly-looking old dame about sixty but she wasn't any too easy in her mind when she found out my errand. I told her I came on behalf of Robert, to urge her to use her influence to induce his wife to return to him. At first she pretended to know nothing of Jane, but finally admitted that she had come to her early yesterday morning to leave a package for which she said she would send; that she was going away. The Ferris woman refused to show me the package and in my capacity as Robert's emissary I couldn't very well insist, but I made sure of one thing; she has never heard of the existence of Sneed's daughter, nor of Carrie Peterson." George paused and added: "It was last night that I saw the Ferris woman and this morning I have been making the rounds of the steamship offices, to see if any of them signed on a stewardess yesterday for the passenger service, but although I didn't meet with any success, it is my opinion that Jane has left the country, for fear of being mixed up with the Peterson gang."

"Unless she has joined them," Cliff said meditatively. "I wonder if Phil has located any 'Shady Lane' near Yonkers?"

At that moment Phil in his own taxi was cruising slowly about the roads which branched off from the highways leading to and from that picturesque little town. Inquiries had failed to elicit any information concerning a Shady

Lake or Shady Lane and the only family of Petersons which he had located were tow-headed and of unmistakably Scandinavian origin.

His was not a patient temperament at best and time was precious, for the hours of Raeburn's announced truce were passing, and more than once he silently cursed himself for a fool. Raeburn was his man at this stage of the game, and no possible connection had been established between him and the Gull. Even should he succeed in finding Red Jim and his daughter he might be no nearer learning the whereabouts of the young ex-convict than he was to a solution of the mystery of Eva Sneed's disappearance. He wondered mightily if his associates had made any headway with the investigation but dogged obstinacy prevented his communicating with them until he himself had something definite to report.

The morning passed, finding him no nearer his goal, and he was on the point of returning to the city in disgust when a sudden thought came to him. The Petersons were old hands at dodging the police; surely despite the urgency and incriminating contents of the letter itself and the fact that they had no reason to fear it would fall under other eyes than Jane's, habitual caution would have deterred them from posting it in the immediate vicinity of the hiding-place they had chosen. That must be farther out into the country and the letter mailed en route. What a simp he had been not to think of that before!

He eagerly scanned the road map but although no "Shady Lane" was marked anywhere in the county he

chose the broadest thoroughfare leading due north and drove along it for an hour or more at the top speed of which his taxi was capable, watching for signposts at each intersecting lane or right of way.

It was well past noon when after hurtling through several villages and narrowly escaping the vengeance of more than one irate constable he came to a small road-house of the humbler sort and stopped for sandwiches and coffee.

“‘Shady Lane?’” The sleepy-looking proprietor scratched his head reflectively. “There’s an old cow path leadin’ off the main road up past Miner’s farm a piece, that a land improvement company wanted to call Shady Lane when they took Mud Pond and tried to sell bungalow lots around it to city folks, but the suckers didn’t bite.”

“Are there any houses on this cow path?” Phil asked.

“Only one little shack of a place with a chicken run and a strip of garden. Fam’ly named Peters lived there a couple of years back, but it’s been empty since.—Want some more coffee?”

Phil declined hastily and paying his bill he obtained more specific directions to the “cow path” and started again upon his way. Miner’s farm was easily located and half a mile beyond it he came to a narrow, grass-grown, deeply rutted road which branched off abruptly to the left. It was bordered by maples and through them he could see the dingy clapboard roof of a little white cottage.

Without hesitation he turned off into the lane and drove up to the sagging gate, where he alighted and strode up

the weed-choked path to the door. Repeated knocking failed to bring any response, but the cracked shade at one of the windows moved slightly and whistling in cheerful nonchalance Phil rounded the house to the back door. There in the act of hastily closing it he came face to face with a tall, red-haired girl whose great eyes glowered sullenly at him like living coals.

"I'm a friend; has Jane come?" he asked quickly. Then as the girl obviously hesitated he added: "This is on the level. Your father Red Jim knows me. Tell him Nifty Phil is here, will you?"

"What do you want? Who sent you to us?" The girl's tones were low and surprisingly musical although her expression did not lighten nor did she by the slightest gesture bid him welcome.

"No one sent me, but Jane Frost got your letter and beat it Monday night. Before she left, though, she told me where I could find your father." Phil paused and then spoke in a tone of boyish candor. "I—I only got out myself a month or two ago and I've got a soft thing that's as safe as a church! I wanted to find an old pal who was pardoned two years ago and though he's only a kid he was a friend of Red Jim's."

"Did this Jane Frost show you any letter from me?" There was the sound of cautious footsteps in the kitchen behind her, but the girl did not turn.

"No. I just happened to mention that I was trying to find Red Jim and she said she'd had a letter from his daughter only that morning," Phil lied glibly. "I couldn't

get away yesterday. Maybe you would know where the Gull is hanging out these days?"

"The Gull!" Her voice was little more than a whisper and her eyes seemed to dilate as both thin hands flew to her breast. "The—Gull!"

"Sure. I've got something right in his line—"

"Phil!" A hearty, deep-toned voice sounded just behind the girl and a huge man with a bristling red beard thrust her unceremoniously aside. "I'm glad to see you, lad! It's all right, Carrie; he's one of the boys!—It's bum stuff leavin' that bus at the gate to draw the attention of the gawks hereabout, but come you in!"

"Father!" A sort of dry, tearless sob ran through Carrie Peterson's tones. "Did you hear what he's come for? He doesn't know—"

"There, my girl!" Red Jim's hand fell upon her shoulder for a moment with rough tenderness. "I'll tell him. Come in, Phil."

He led the way through the kitchen to a small front room containing a rickety bed, a table upon which stood a single candle stuck in a cracked cup and several packing cases. Seating himself gingerly upon one the big man motioned to another.

"It's poor welcome I can give you in these days, lad, but a hearty one, for all that," he said. "It's a pity you spoke of the Gull to her, though, for she'll not get over it for days."

"You don't mean—!" Phil paused with an assumption of surprise. "He never mentioned her and I didn't know they were—?"

Red Jim nodded slowly.

"She was fair gone on him and she's not got over his death yet."

"'Death!'" There was no need of simulation now. "I knew he was railroaded through old Sneed that he built the safe for, and that some woman worked to get him free, but none of the old crowd I've been able to dig up know that he croaked! When—?"

"Three months after he got out. We brought him here to this shack and Carrie nursed him till the end, but he was too far gone with the con." Red Jim brought his great hand down on his knee with a thumping whack. "It was hard, for they'd have made a fine pair, Phil, and I doubt she'll ever look at another man."

"Gee! The Gull gone!" There was genuine regret in Phil's tone. "It's tough on her, all right; tough any way you look at it! He might have done big things some day.— I wonder why Sneed had him framed after he turned his invention over to him, though different from the way he'd planned to apply it? He couldn't have done it to keep his mouth shut, for the Gull had plenty of time before his trial and after, to slip the details on to anyone else if he'd wanted to. What was the game?"

"I never knew, rightly." Red Jim shook his head. "I got an idea that old Sneed thought the Gull had learned too much about his affairs, whatever they were, but there was something queer about that safe, too. The Gull wouldn't speak of it before, but just at the last he tried to tell me something. It was too late then, though."

"Well," Phil rose. "This is a staggerer for me, Jim. I'm dead sorry I mentioned him to your girl, but how was I to know?—I had a nice little thing on for him that nobody else would ever be able to handle so I'll have to pass it up. I'll get on back to town now, but if you ever want me, look me up here."

He scribbled on a bit of paper the address of the room which for professional purposes he occupied in the tenement quarter of the city, and handed it to his host as he took leave of him. The girl Carrie was not in evidence, but as he backed his taxi to turn in the narrow lane he caught a glimpse of a tall, slim figure clad in faded blue standing rigidly beneath one of the trees in the gnarled old orchard, and Phil's thoughts wandered for the moment from the investigation on hand back to that somber gray house up the river and the Gull with his flash of genius, warped though it might have been, and his dreams which never came true.

It was just past seven when his taxi drew up before the Bolingbroke Building and he ascended to the suite occupied by the Shadowers to find Rex, Cliff, Luce and George standing about the table in the inner office with a curiously shocked expression stamped upon all their faces.

"What is it?" Phil demanded. "What has happened?"

Rex, whose hand still rested upon the hook of the telephone receiver, turned slowly and spoke in a repressed yet shaken tone.

"The Shadowers have lost a client. Phineas Sneed is dead!—Murdered!"

CHAPTER XVII

—AND GAIN A NEW ONE

“SNEED dead! Good God, you can’t mean it!” Phil started forward. “How do you know?”

“Old Robert telephoned to us just an instant before you came in.” Rex spoke more firmly but he seemed to be regaining control of himself with an effort. “Sneed had sent him on an errand and he returned to find his employer stabbed with one of the weapons from his own collection, as near as I was able to make out, for the old man was scarcely able to speak.”

“But—but the twenty-four hours are barely over; it’s still light!” Phil stammered. “Raeburn couldn’t have—?”

“We won’t know until we get over there ourselves and I don’t think we had better waste any time about it!” Rex turned resolutely to the others. “There was a funny choking rattle in old Robert’s voice that I didn’t like and he broke off in the middle of a sentence; I couldn’t get him back on the wire again.”

“You don’t think he was attacked? That Sneed’s assailant was still in the apartment?” asked Phil as the rest threw off the numbing shock of the tragedy and hurriedly caught up their hats.

“It’s more likely that he was interrupted by someone from the office of the hotel,” Luce observed with a swift

remembrance of the previous evening's talk with Mabel Kerrigan. "If the girl at the switchboard was listening in and heard about the murder the whole management will be up there and perhaps the authorities, too!"

They maintained a discreet silence in the elevator, but when all five had crowded into one taxi and it started across town Rex glanced quickly at Phil and remarked:

"It's early to speculate, of course, but I wonder if this could be the work of the Gull or someone acting for him?"

"The Gull died three months after he was pardoned," Phil returned quietly. "The only person who keeps his memory alive has no thought of revenge and besides is provided with an alibi that couldn't be shaken."

"Then you found Red Jim and his daughter?" George demanded.

"I've found out what became of the Gull and that is all I was after." There was a warning note of reserve in the young ex-yegg's tones which caused George to meet Rex's eyes in a significant glance. Both recalled in a swift flash the condition which Phil had made when he joined the Shadowers: that he would drop any investigation which led him upon the trail of those of his former profession who had been his pals. Red Jim and his daughter were implicated in a diamond smuggling trick and while they were presumably wanted by the police Phil would loyally keep whatever discoveries he had made to himself.

"Well, it isn't important now, is it?" Rex shrugged. "Our status in this case from now on is problematic, to say the least, since we have lost our client. I don't know

how you boys feel about it but it has become a personal matter with me, for, whether we disliked the old man or not, he had put himself in our hands and it was up to us to protect him. I look upon it as a moral duty to find his murderer."

The others nodded gravely in confirmation but little more was said until they reached the hotel. It was evident that no word of the tragedy had leaked through to the management although the clerk looked his amazement at the sight of the erstwhile guest "Mr. Ballantyne" in the company of men who had been brought thither by Sneed's manservant four days before.

Ascending in the elevator they found the entrance door which led to Sneed's private hall swinging ajar and were about to pass through when Henry appeared around the corner of the corridor and halted in blank amazement.

"You'd better come with us; there's something wrong!" Rex explained in a hurried undertone.

"You don't mean foul play!" Henry's jaw dropped. "What has brought you all here? What have you heard?"

Rex responded briefly with a repetition of the 'phone message and when they had crowded up the stairs and saw that the heavily carved door leading into the reception room also stood open, he stopped the others and called sharply:

"Robert!"

No answer came and his voice seemed to echo back almost mockingly from the great, silent rooms. He called again and again without result and then Phil stepped forward determinedly.

"I'm going in and see for myself what has happened!" he declared. "Maybe Robert can't hear, but—!"

Leaving his sentence unfinished he strode ahead and the others followed through the reception room to the huge corner living-room. In the waning light which came through the bare, unshaded windows they saw that two of the heavy chairs had been overturned, a rug rumped and kicked aside and on the polished floor in an oddly distorted attitude like some fantastic doll lay the small, shrivelled form of their late client.

Henry advanced but before he could touch it Rex exclaimed:

"Wait! We can't afford to get ourselves into trouble over this and court the slightest suspicion that we are implicated in what has taken place, or it will be the end of the Shadowers!—Luce, go to the telephone which you will find in the library there and call down to the office. Don't give details but ask that the proprietor come up here at once."

Luce started for the library but halted on the threshold with a low ejaculation. The next instant he had sprung forward.

"Here is old Robert! He must have had a stroke or something! Come and help me to lift him, one of you!"

Crumpled in a heap beside the table from over the edge of which the receiver of the telephone hung suspended lay the old manservant. George and Cliff raised the limp form and bore it to a couch. A waxen pallor with a slightly bluish tinge had settled upon the relaxed features

from which the lines of age appeared to have been smoothed away and Henry, hurrying from the living-room, made only the most superficial of examinations before he announced:

"Robert's gone, too! Heart disease. The attack must have seized him at the telephone, brought on by the shock of finding his employer dead, and that is why he never finished his sentence, Rex. We had better get the proprietor as quick as we can."

Luce caught up the receiver which had fallen from the dying hand and 'phoned the delayed message. George was bending over the body of the servant and as Luce turned he straightened with a creased and rumpled bit of paper which he had drawn from one of the pockets. Smoothing it out between his fingers he glanced at it hastily and then called out:

"Listen to this, you fellows! Robert lied to me yesterday, after all!—You can be an obstinate old fool and stick here to land behind the bars if you're minded to, but I'm off. The game is up and only trouble can come. Don't say I didn't warn you and don't try to follow me, for you'll never lay eyes on me again. Jane'."

"Let me see." Cliff took the note from George and nodded as he glanced at it. "Yes. It is the same handwriting as the list Jane made out which Sneed himself showed to me. I cannot imagine what 'game' is up, though, nor why she thought Robert would land behind the bars for helping his employer to keep an insane daughter under restraint. She couldn't have anticipated the murder—!"

"If it *was* murder, in the strictest sense of the word," Rex interrupted from the doorway. He held in his hand a slender foil of finely tempered steel. "I trod upon this just now over near the davenport, but it's mate lies under Sneed's fingers. Unless it was placed there after he fell, it looks to me as though a desperate duel had taken place and the old man's adversary got off scot free, for Sneed's foil has no stains upon it. But look at this!"

The tip of the foil was tinged with red and smudges extended part way up the blade as he held it out for their inspection.

Luce shuddered.

"I saw that the old man had been stabbed through the throat!" he murmured, and then his eyes darted swiftly to the still figure on the couch. "Do you suppose it could have been Robert himself?—That there was no intruder here?"

Henry shook his head decidedly.

"He would not have had the strength for such a blow and he was too decrepit to fight. Sneed was active and wiry, you know, and old Robert almost ten years older than he.—Good Lord, what's that?"

A sharp click followed by a subdued whirring sound had broken in upon him and they turned in time to see a section of the walnut panelling which met to form the corner in the wall near the fireplace recede a few inches and then rise smoothly behind the upper part as the safe projected itself into the room and stopped with a thud.

"So that's the invention!" Luce stared. "Who started it working?"

"I did." Phil turned from before one of the bookcases.

"But you haven't been anywhere near it—!"

"I didn't have to be. You forget that I know the secret of the mechanism." He advanced to the safe and added over his shoulder. "I'll explain it to you fellows afterwards. I thought we had better see what was in here before the proprietor comes and I'll have to work fast for I've got to dope out the combination."

"That's a good idea," commended Rex. "I don't see what's keeping him, though, if he is around the hotel."

"What are you going to tell him, anyway?" asked Cliff.

"I am going to introduce ourselves under our true guise as the Shadowers," Rex smiled slightly. "I will explain how we came to be here and give him what details I think will be good for him. If I am not mistaken he may make us a proposition on his own account. That is why I didn't want Sneed's body touched until his arrival."

"And here he comes now!" George announced suddenly. "Let's meet him in the living-room so as to give Phil a chance with the safe."

Heavy footsteps were hurriedly ascending the private staircase and a moment later a portentous cough sounded from the reception-room doorway.

"Did Mr. Sneed wish to see me?—Someone telephoned down—?"

"Come in, sir. You are the proprietor?" Rex stepped forward and confronted a portly, dignified looking man in

the late fifties, with the unctous, urbane manner of the born boniface. Just now, however, his face was troubled as he gazed somewhat doubtfully from one to the other of them.

"I am Hamilton Ridgeway, sir. Is Mr. Sneed—?" He broke off as his eyes fell upon Luce and he exclaimed: "Ah, Mr. Ballantyne—!"

"Mr. Baynes, a valued member of our organization, Mr. Ridgeway. The reason for his sojourn here under another name, as well as that of Doctor Corliss who is registered as 'Doctor Carter' will be fully explained to you in a moment. First, however, we have bad news for you. A crime has been committed here under your roof, a tragedy has taken place.—Look!"

Rex had been standing squarely in front of the proprietor but now he moved aside, disclosing the distorted figure on the floor.

Ridgeway's florid face turned ashen and he took a trembling step or two forward.

"Great Heavens, what is this!" he exclaimed in a half-smothered tone. "Mr. Sneed! He has been attacked!"

"He has been murdered," Rex corrected with deliberation. "We have feared an attempt of this sort and warned Mr. Sneed against it but we were powerless to prevent it."

"'Murdered!'" Ridgeway repeated, still aghast. "But this is horrible, gentlemen!—Almost unbelievable! Such a thing as crime has never darkened the doors of the Burlingame before in all its history!—But who are you? You spoke of an organization—?"

"We are the Shadows, a corporation of private investigators. This will explain our methods and purpose to you more concisely than I could at the moment, Mr. Ridgeway."

Rex produced one of the circular announcements of their firm and the proprietor read it in a bewildered fashion.

"Private detectives!" His tone was shocked as though the bare mention of the words was a profanation to the sacred precincts of the hotel. "But how do you come to be here, and what were these two—er—gentlemen doing registered under assumed names?"

"We were called in by Mr. Sneed on Saturday to investigate a certain matter for him, and Mr. Baynes and later Doctor Corliss and a female assistant were installed here in the line of duty," responded Rex. "We may not break faith with our client even though he is dead, but it is only right that you should know he had received two threatening, anonymous letters from a bitter and ruthless enemy; robbery was not the motive for this murder, it was revenge."

"But—but Mr. Sneed has been practically a recluse for years!" stammered Ridgeway. "How can that be possible?"

"Mr. Sneed had been ruthless also in his time and made many personal enemies," Rex returned. "One of them in particular, the author of those letters, believed he had been so deeply injured that nothing but our client's death would make reparation. Mr. Sneed did not wish him apprehended because of the scandal which would ensue,

but left it to us to find his enemy and turn him from his course. However, Mr. Sneed did not take us sufficiently into his confidence until it was too late for our efforts to be of avail. Had he been frank with us from the beginning this tragedy might never have occurred."

"Where is his servant?" Ridgeway demanded suddenly. "His housekeeper left without notice a day or two ago, I understand, but the old man should be about."

"He is." Rex's tone was grim as the whirring sound came to them again followed by a metallic clang, and Phil appeared in the library doorway. "Robert discovered his employer's body and fell dead himself from heart disease superinduced by shock as he was telephoning to us. This occurred not half an hour ago and we came at once, finding the situation as you see it. Our investigation has brought to light one point which is important to you and your interests, Mr. Ridgeway; our client's enemy has an ally or accomplice here at the Burlingame."

"Here?" The proprietor sank down weakly in the nearest chair. "Mr. Sneed has lived alone with his servants for years, associating with no one and receiving no visitors except occasionally his attorney, Mr. Hodge.— Good heavens, Mr. Hodge must be notified, and the police, too!"

He started up but Rex waved him back.

"We will attend to it for you, Mr. Ridgeway. A few minutes more or less will make no difference. I suppose the notoriety incidental to the publication of the murder will affect your business here unfavorably?"

“Unfavorably?” It will mean ruin, sir! The management of the Burlingame has not been a business with me but an institution, handed down from my father and his father before him. Its history is a record of the passing aristocracy of New York and those who have taken up their residence under its roof are the most conservative element of the old school. They have for the most part been here for many years but at the first breath of scandal or notoriety, the first suspicion of a crime, they will leave at once. The Burlingame will be forced to close its doors!”

He dropped his head dejectedly in his hand and the despair in his voice was unfeigned. Rex darted a quick glance significantly about at the others, and then remarked:

“That will be a pity, especially in view of the fact that Mr. Sneed left no one to mourn him, or feel a personal interest in having his murderer apprehended. He will never be convicted for he can claim a plea of self-defence; he was fighting for his own life with Mr. Sneed and was lucky enough to get in a fatal thrust first. See!” Rex pointed out the two foils and the relative positions in which they had been found and added: “We do not work with the police but with our individual clients, for their best interests. I do not mean that we condone crime, but when one is committed which indirectly and innocently involves our client we leave it to his discretion to report the matter or not as he sees fit. In some instances, as in this case when it would be hopeless to attempt to convict the guilty man and the notoriety will serve no good end but rather bring about the most disastrous results, we have

even aided most materially in suppressing the whole unfortunate affair. Our former client is dead and we cannot help him now by publicly exposing the man who caused his death, nor can any good purpose be achieved by the announcement that such a hideous affair has taken place within the four walls of the Burlingame."

Hamilton Ridgeway who had been listening with a growing eagerness of attention started once more from his chair.

"Am I to understand, gentlemen, that it might be possible for you to—er—avert the disaster which is hanging over me?" he cried. "But we—we would be accessories after the fact to murder! If the truth were ever known—!"

"Not murder; justifiable homicide in self-defense," Rex reminded him. "We are a completely equipped organization with every means at our command to suppress all evidence of what has taken place and supply other evidence later which will satisfactorily account for Mr. Sneed's death abroad."

Ridgeway's face flushed deeply and he held out both hands as he exclaimed in a shaking voice:

"Then do this for me, gentlemen, and whatever sum you require for your services down to the last cent at my disposal shall be yours. I—I am of course shocked and grieved at Mr. Sneed's death, but, as you say, no good can come of making the manner of it public now, and the disgrace and ruin of the Burlingame after all these honored years would be more than I could endure! Then, too, I

must know the identity of the accomplice who you tell me is here. Gentlemen, may I ask that you will accept me as your client? I take the risk of possible exposure with you, I ask no questions as to how you propose to suppress this unfortunate affair—”

“It would be wiser for your own protection that we do not go into details, Mr. Ridgeway,” Rex interrupted while his associates gazed at him in stupefaction. “Our terms can be agreed upon later. You have merely to leave us here in charge tonight and when the usual room waiter comes tomorrow morning with Mr. Sneed’s breakfast he will find the upper and lower entrance doors open, Robert dead in his bed from heart disease and evidence that Mr. Sneed himself has gone upon a journey. There will be no indication that a crime or even a disturbance has taken place; you can have Robert’s body removed quietly to an undertaking establishment and assume the funeral expenses until such time as Mr. Sneed may return. Do you understand?”

“I must confess that I do not. It sounds like sheer magic to me, but you inspire me with confidence and hope.” Ridgeway extended his hand. “Do you wish any especial arrangements made to facilitate your departure with the—er—evidence?”

“Only that the freight elevator and tradesmen’s entrance to the hotel be at our disposal from ten o’clock until midnight, and the watchmen kept from that part of the building. It is agreed?”

Rex shook hands and then introduced George, Cliff and Phil by name, adding of the latter:

"Mr. Howe is our mechanical expert and he has been examining the contents of Mr. Sneed's safe for us.—Did you find any will?"

"No." Phil shook his head. "If Mr. Sneed left one, it is probably in his attorney's hands."

His left eyelid contracted as he spoke, however, and Rex turned hastily to their new client.

"I will ask you to come and view Robert's body, Mr. Ridgeway, and then we will set about our own preparations. Do not permit anyone, guests and employees alike, to suspect from your manner this evening that anything out of the ordinary has occurred, but see that instructions reach the room waiter, presumably from Robert, that no dinner will be required to be served up here tonight. If you will come now—?"

He led the way into the library, described the finding of Robert's body and with a few minor instructions to Ridgeway he escorted him down the private staircase and closed the lower entrance door after him. When he re-entered the apartment above he found that his five associates had gathered in the reception room and with one accord they turned accusing eyes on him. It was Henry, however, who voiced their sentiments.

"This is one grand little mess you've got us all into now, Rex! What's the good of it, anyway?"

CHAPTER XVIII

CONSPIRATORS

"I TOLD you I felt it a moral duty to find Sneed's murderer but I did not add that I meant to turn him over to the police," Rex replied to Henry's question. "What I proposed to the proprietor here is far from impossible of accomplishment, it serves a laudable purpose in suppressing a scandal, and gives us an opportunity to pursue our own investigation unhindered. We failed to protect Sneed but I have a theory about his death which, if I can verify it, will prove that we were not guilty of negligence. I feel that we are responsible, however, for that demented daughter of his, of whose existence it is evident that Ridgeway never heard, and we ought to assure ourselves that she is safe."

"That's so." George nodded. "If Raeburn killed the old man he at least gave him a chance for his life, even though the fight was an unequal one. He'll naturally be waiting for the storm to burst and when it doesn't sheer curiosity will make him show his hand in some way and perhaps enable us to locate him."

"And I suppose it is going to be a simple matter to spirit a dead body away in this man's town!" Phil exclaimed. "What are we going to do with Sneed after we get him?"

"Henry succeeded in spiriting another body away once

without any difficulty, if you remember," Rex observed. "You can bring your taxi to the tradesmen's entrance just after ten o'clock and Henry can depart with a small trunk. I noticed one in Sneed's dressing-room when we passed through it yesterday afternoon to examine his daughter's apartments and I think we can get him into it without any trouble before rigor mortis sets in. Henry can rush it to his laboratory and embalm the body; it is lucky for us that he was an undertaker's assistant as a boy!"

"I thought I would be the goat in this, somewhere!" Henry mourned. "I don't say we mightn't get away with it so far, but what then? I don't particularly fancy having him around—!"

"Oh, after that it will be up to Cliff and George," responded Rex.

"Me!" Cliff exclaimed. "I'm a handwriting expert, not a magician!"

"And I am afraid I am not psychic enough to make a material body vanish into thin air," George remarked. "What's the idea?"

"Merely that Cliff should be able to manufacture a very creditable death certificate and George can make arrangements for his poor old uncle's burial in some obscure country cemetery, say in Jersey. You can fake any reason you like, George, for your uncle's desire to be interred in that particular spot, and you are plausible enough to get away with it in a rural community."

"There's just one little detail you appear to have overlooked, Rex," Luce drawled. "The superintendent and

employees of the Bolingbroke are accustomed to our eccentricities in the manner of conducting our business, but won't even they look askance at a coffin being brought in and out?"

"Not after the advent of that mummy case I had installed in George's seance room," Rex retorted. "We can easily disguise the coffin so that they will think it is another one and it can be removed in an ordinary express wagon to some cheap little undertaking establishment in Newark or Hoboken. What do you say?—I suppose I should have consulted you boys about this before I sprang it, but there wasn't time. After all, this was Phil's case—."

"That's all right; I'll be generous!" Phil exclaimed hastily. "The Gull is dead but his convict number was scribbled on the envelope of that anonymous letter of Raeburn's. That's the part of this investigation which still has me going, and I mean to have a heart-to-heart talk with that guy when we get him!"

"Why did you wink when you said Sneed had left no will in the safe?" George asked suddenly.

"Because it isn't there any longer. I've got it in my pocket, or rather, two of them, and there's something funny about them but they will keep till later." Phil patted his pocket as he spoke and added: "But what shall we do with Ethel? Won't she be looking for her Uncle Henry?"

"Good Lord!" Henry started up in dismay. "She's been waiting all this time for me to take her to dinner!"

"You'd better go and get her and bring her here," Rex

suggested. "We'll keep her out in the reception room, of course, but she will have to be told what has happened. You can take her down to dinner then and afterward she may pack and go home. There is nothing for her to do here any longer and we will need her at the office in the morning."

But Ethel unexpectedly presented difficulties to this arrangement when she shortly appeared in tow of Henry. He had told her of the deaths of Sneed and his old servant and her face was subdued but by no means as shocked as they had anticipated.

"So they got him, did they?" she commented and to Rex's horror there seemed to be something very like satisfaction in her tone. "Uncle Henry says we are working for the proprietor now."

"Yes, in a way," Rex responded. "What we are really looking for is to find out how that young lady, Sneed's daughter, got out of here and who helped her. You haven't made any report to us since you came, Ethel; did you find out anything when you examined her rooms yesterday afternoon?"

"I didn't report because I wasn't ready, Mr. Powell," Ethel said briefly without seeming to have heard the question. "I ain't—I'm not ready yet. Uncle Henry tells me I am to go home tonight but I'd like to stay till tomorrow, if it's all right. Couldn't I? Oh, I've just *got* to stay!"

The little cry broke from her in unconcealed eagerness and George remarked drily:

"It looks as though Henry were right, and our little friend here *has* taken the bit in her teeth!"

"Ethel, if you have found out anything it is your duty to tell us," Rex admonished her earnestly. "That is what we sent you here for, you know. We have trusted you—"

"I know!" she interrupted quickly. "That is just why I want to stay a little longer. I don't know where the young lady is, but I have a kind of an idea who might have helped her. If I have to go away now they'll never speak and you couldn't prove anything. Do you see?"

"Who is it?" Phil cried. "Who helped her to get away?"

But Ethel's small chin was thrust suddenly forward in a way that they recognized and she replied with an air of finality:

"It is only a hunch that I've got and maybe it's wrong. Please don't think I am trying to be smart but I know that if I can't make them speak, nobody can. It would only spoil everything if even Mr. Powell butted in now. You sent me here to find out something; please, can't I stay and do it? I'll leave right after breakfast tomorrow and be at the office on time."

Phil shrugged and Rex replied slowly.

"It seems reasonable enough, Ethel, only I am sorry you will not confide in us, my dear. Do you think it is quite fair?"

An odd little smile twisted the corners of the girl's lips for an instant, but she spoke seriously enough.

"Yes, I do, Mr. Powell. If I was to say anything now you'd think I was crazy, too.—When you do find the young

lady what'll become of her now that her father is dead? If she is nutty, who will take care of her?"

"Oh, Mr. Sneed was a rich man and his daughter will be more than well provided for as long as she lives," Henry replied smoothly. "We'll see to that; we'll put her away in some nice, quiet place where she will have every care and attention."

"When you find her," Ethel repeated, nodding. "Can I stay till tomorrow, then?"

"Yes, but Ethel, you haven't told us anything!" Rex protested. "How did you receive those burns on your hands and arms? Are they very painful?"

He glanced at the light gloves, several sizes too large, which encased her hands and met the lace frills at her wrists. They bulged with the outline of bandages beneath and Ethel colored as her own glance followed his.

"They don't hurt a bit, honestly!" She tried to pull her tight sleeves down more closely. "It was my own fault, for I'd ought to have known better. I—I'd rather not talk about it now; won't it be all right if I tell you tomorrow? Maybe I'm kind of upset tonight about Mr. Sneed's being murdered—"

"You didn't seem to be!" Henry retorted in exasperation. "You took it as calm as a summer night when I told you!—This is the way she has acted ever since yesterday! Do you wonder I couldn't do anything with her?"

He turned to the others but Rex, who had been watching the girl's face narrowly, intervened.

"Never mind. Ethel will tell us everything tomorrow, I am sure. If you'll just take her to dinner now—?"

"Oh, please!" She gave a little shudder of repulsion. "How could anybody want dinner, thinking of—of what's in there! If you will just let me go back to my room I'll order a cup of tea and—and you won't hear anything more from me tonight, but I'll promise faithfully to come to the office tomorrow morning!"

With this they were forced to be content but a little silence fell for a moment after she had taken her departure. It was broken by an impatient question from Henry.

"Well, what do you think of her?"

"Perhaps we should have compelled her to tell us what she knows or suspects," Rex said reluctantly. "If she has any real information we are at too serious a crisis to trust to the judgment of an inexperienced girl, but I have an uncomfortable conviction that if we attempt to coerce her and force her confidence she is quite capable of retaliating by drawing upon her rather too vivid imagination."

"Stuffing us with rank lies." Luce nodded. "That is what I think, too. It was best to let her have her own way and she will probably come through tomorrow. In the meantime, we'd better get ahead with this grisly business, but I will admit that I am curious about that safe."

"I am, myself." Henry rose. "Let us dispose of poor Robert first, though. One of you help me carry him to his room and I will fix him as he must be found in the morning."

Robert's body was borne from the library and Sneed's

was lifted upon a davenport, while all other traces of the double tragedy were thoroughly eliminated. Rex was replacing the brace of foils in the space upon the wall from which they had been taken when Henry returned and together they followed the others into the library.

"The point about the Gull's invention which made this safe different from any other mechanically disappearing one was the system of leverage and control," Phil was explaining to George, Luce and Cliff. "He was going to use it in that amusement park stunt which was his first idea as a sort of enormous swing that would hold a dozen people or more, dipping them down and scooping them up more breathlessly than the steepest roller coaster. For exhibition purposes he had planned to construct a single-seater, controlled by the person occupying it and capable of looping the loop sidewise as well as forward and back, for all the world like a kid swinging a ball around over his head on the end of a string. The ordinary passenger swing was to have been operated by the simple pressure of the starter's foot on a spring concealed in the floor about twenty feet away and it was to slow down and stop mechanically, on a sort of time-lock process."

"I don't see anything very remarkable in that!" George observed. "It's like a dozen other of those stunts."

"Not in its basic principle," dissented Phil. "It would have been the most thrilling sensation on the Island, and absolutely safe, but the Gull could never get anyone to back him, as you know. The very first glimpse I had of this safe showed me that it was controlled in the same

way and I was sure that either the Gull himself or someone who had stolen the invention from him had installed it. Then of course when I saw those numbers on the envelope I knew the truth.—This floor is inlaid, as you see, and over here by the bookcase this diamond-shaped block of lighter wood is raised just a fraction of an inch higher than the rest. The pressure must come directly on the point nearest the corner behind which the safe is concealed.—Watch!”

Pacing with an air of indifference across the floor Phil brought his toe down upon the point of the diamond he had indicated and rested upon it for a moment, then walked on, but instantly there came the now familiar click and whirr, the wall slid back and up, and the safe projected itself forward into the room. It had scarcely stopped when the young man was on his knees before it, twirling the combination.

“It’s very simple,” he remarked. “Sneed didn’t take much trouble to think up a hard series of numbers; I guess he figured that the way the safe was hidden protected it enough. I thought maybe Rex and one or two other of you fellows might want to look over what is in here but you’ll have to be quick about it, for it closes and rolls back automatically in a few minutes. That’s what puzzled you so much when you first saw it close of itself; of course Sneed didn’t move a muscle, for it works on the time-lock system, as the swing would have done.”

He threw open the door of the safe and Rex, Cliff and George crowded down before it. Deeds, stock certificates

and railroad bonds arranged in neat packets met their eyes, together with account books with records of financial transactions of all sorts, but nothing of a more personal nature was there and they were turning away when Rex's eyes fell upon the black tin despatch box which he had noted on his first visit. He drew it forth and found that it was locked and weighted with something that rustled slightly when he shook it, like papers closely packed in.

"We'd better take this along and open it at the office, at our leisure," he suggested. "It may possibly contain letters or some data that will give us a clue.—That's all here, I think."

"Look out, the safe is going to close!" warned Phil. Then he glanced at his watch with a start of surprise. "Do you fellows know that it is long past eight? If we're going to get Sneed's body out of here at ten, we'd better get busy with the preliminary arrangements."

At the comparatively quiet hour of the evening before the theatre crowds were issuing forth for further diversion and while the stay-at-homes were retiring, a taxi with dim lights drew up before the tradesmen's entrance to the Burlingame. A wait of a few minutes ensued and then the double doors opened and two men appeared in shirt sleeves bearing a small, stout trunk between them. One was tall and lean, with a lugubrious cast of countenance and the other short and corpulent, his hatless, bald head shining in the subdued glow of the lights.

The trunk was hoisted up and deposited carefully be-

side the chaffeur and the fat man returned to the hotel entrance again to reappear with his hat and coat. A brief colloquy followed, then he climbed into the taxi and was whirled away. The tall, thin man watched it until it rounded a corner and disappeared, then he turned and re-entered the hotel, and quiet settled down once more.

CHAPTER XIX

THE EMPTY BOX

“I TELL you, this is a serious business and I won’t breathe easy until we know that Sneed is safely buried.” Henry gazed about anxious-eyed at the other four Shadowers who were seated around the table in Rex’s consulting room. “It was fortunate that the wound made by the rapier point piercing the jugular vein was so small; it didn’t look like anything more than a pin-prick when I got through with it, but I shouldn’t care to have it too closely examined.”

“Well, it was the first time I ever—er—filled in a death certificate, and I’ve taken as big a chance as you!” averred Cliff. “How in the world did you get hold of the bona fide blanks, Rex?”

Rex smiled.

“I thought they might come in handy sometime, so I managed to secure them together with some birth and marriage certificates; a disgruntled printer’s assistant is not always unapproachable if one knows how to go about it.—I wonder what is keeping Ethel? She promised to be here on time and however headstrong that young person may be I have never known her to break her word.”

“She will probably put in an appearance when she feels inclined.” Luce shrugged. “As for our late client, I don’t

think there can have been any hitch so far or George would have got in touch with us. By now he must have left the body at the undertaker's in Hoboken and be well on his way to that little village,—what is it called?"

"Greenvale," Cliff replied. "Say, how about those two wills you found in the safe last night, Phil? You said there was something funny about them."

"I have them here." Phil drew two large folded sheets of paper from his pocket and spread them out upon the table. "The first one, you see, is dated four years ago and it looks to me to be a regular, legal document, properly signed and witnessed and all. It doesn't even mention his daughter but after those small bequests to Robert and Jane and a few to some charities and museums all the rest of his estate is left to his lawyer, Ellsworth Hodge. Don't you see something kind of funny about that when you take the date into consideration?"

Henry nodded slowly.

"Just about the time of the Gull's trial and conviction, wasn't it? That was probably a part of Hodge's price beside what he must have gotten from Sneed at the time."

"That is what it looks like to me." Phil pushed forward the other paper. "Sneed meant to double-cross him, though, even in death. They must have been a precious pair! This will is dated just two days later and judging from the signature on the first and from some memoranda I found, I think it is in Sneed's own handwriting. He was careful to draw it up in the same form as the other, but he has left more to both Robert and Jane and the rest

to charities, with never a word of Hodge or his daughter, either. What I can't get through my head is why he didn't destroy the first will after he drew up the second?"

"That ought to be easily explained," Rex observed. "He kept the first in order to let Hodge see it from time to time when he called and make him confident that it was the only one in existence. The witnesses of course are different in each will."

"Yes." Cliff was examining them painstakingly under a magnifying glass. "Those on the first, Warren Hunter and Ceoffrey Cole, are probably law clerks in Hodge's own office. I would know that type of hand anywhere, but the writing in the other two signatures is straggling and illiterate although childishly plain."

"'Dennis McGill and John Bailey,'" Luce read over his shoulder. "Servants, probably, employees of the hotel. Unless he made separate provision for his daughter and set aside a sum for her support and care, we'll have a fight with Hodge, when we find her, to prevent his having himself appointed as her guardian and then gobbling up all that the courts might allow for her maintenance if the will were broken in the poor creature's favor. I take it that it goes without saying we are agreed to accept her as a sort of moral responsibility?"

"If Raeburn hasn't beaten us to it," Rex amended. "From what I have heard of him from men whom I would believe to be keen judges of character, if he ever really cared for her he will protect her in her unfortunate condition."

"Which means that you think that second anonymous letter he presumably dictated was a mere bluff?" Cliff raised his eyebrows. "I don't. I think he had no more idea at that time where the girl was than we have now. If she managed somehow to escape unaided from the Burlingame, do you realize the percentage against her ever turning up again except in the morgue?"

"I went there yesterday morning," Phil confessed. "And I made the rounds of the hospitals, too, but no word has come to the address I left that she has been brought in. If Ethel cannot help us it looks as though we were pretty badly stumped."

"Then I—I'm afraid you are!" The clear, girlish voice sounded somewhat ruefully behind them and turning they beheld Ethel standing in the panel space which led to the outer office. She was dressed in a cheaply vivid though clever counterfeit of the season's latest mode but her small face was pale and drawn, her eyes deeply circled and the smile with which she favored them was a somewhat uncertain one. "Excuse me for walking in on you like this. I knocked and knocked but nobody heard me."

"Put that package down and take this chair, Ethel." Rex drew one forward as he spoke. "Does that remark you made when you entered mean that you have found out nothing that will help us, after all?"

She put the large, shapeless brown paper package which she was carrying on the table and seated herself on the edge of the chair.

"No, I—I haven't done anything to help." Her eyes

were downcast as she replied: "I made an awful mistake, so it was just as well that I didn't tell you last evening what I thought. I was sure somebody had helped the young lady and that I knew who it was, but they hadn't at all! I hated to come and tell you that I had been a failure, but I promised."

"Well, my dear, we have none of us done any better in that direction than you have," Henry said consolingly. "Did you give up your room at the Burlingame?"

She shook her head.

"No, I didn't. I came to ask you if I couldn't stay just a little longer; say, till tomorrow? There's a chance yet that I can make good—"

"Not unless you come absolutely clean with us, Ethel." There was a note of sternness in Rex's tones which the girl had never heard before from him and a deep flush dyed her cheeks. "You are like a soldier now, under orders. If you don't tell us what you are doing you may spoil our game for us."

"But I haven't done anything, really!" Her eyes opened wide. "I just didn't want to tell you how silly I'd been! There's a—a young lady in the room across the hall from mine who seemed to be acting strange from the first sight I got of her through her opened door the afternoon Doctor Corliss and I went to the hotel. That's why I had my meals upstairs, so I could leave my own door a little open and watch her. If I had told Doctor Corliss he might have hung around, too, and made her and the other one suspicious."

"What other one?" demanded Henry.

"The stout, oldish woman with her, that I took to be a kind of a nurse." Ethel looked down at her hands, still bandaged beneath the large gloves, and wiggled her fingers experimentally. "I managed to get acquainted with that one the first evening but I couldn't get anything out of her. I would have sounded the chambermaid about them yesterday morning but she did up my room and left while I was out shopping. Last night after I saw you in Mr. Sneed's apartment I came down and got talking to that nurse again and she told me that her patient was just getting over an operation and they had to keep her under the influence of dope most of the time. Of course, I thought that was just a—a story, but this morning I asked the chambermaid about it and she said it was true and that the lady had been there for five years."

"Do you mean to say you thought the young lady,—Sneed's daughter—would have been crazy enough to try to hide herself away in the same hotel, within a stone's throw of her father's door?" Luce expostulated half incredulously.

"Yes, and I didn't think it would prove that she was crazy, either," Ethel retorted. "If she had the nerve for it and could stay out of sight it came to me that it was the last place in the world anyone would have looked for her. But it wasn't the same young lady, after all. If I'd had a picture of her or knew what she looked like I wouldn't have wasted these two days."

"We have a picture, a little snapshot which Sneed gave us himself," Henry exclaimed. "Where is it, Cliff?"

"On the table in my study," Cliff responded absently. He had bent again to a perusal of the two wills. "Go and look at it, Ethel."

When she had picked up her package and departed Luce glanced significantly at their leader.

"Do you remember what we said last night? We've crowded Ethel and she has—to put it mildly—resorted to subterfuge. I don't believe there is a word of truth in that story about the doped lady!"

"We could verify it if it were worth while, I suppose," Henry suggested. "It sounds fishy to me, too, that she would not have remained in yesterday morning until she had had an opportunity to cultivate the chambermaid. Her type always talks to the servants and that would have been her first move if she had really wanted information concerning anybody on that floor. I'll get at the truth about one thing, though. I am going to make her let me bandage her hands before she leaves the office again, and tell me how she burned herself."

"She's a long time, isn't she? That picture is right out in plain sight on my desk." Cliff looked up. "Are you going to let her back to the Burlingame, Rex?"

Before Rex could reply Ethel re-entered with the snapshot in her hand.

"This isn't a bit like that lady across the hall from me." She caught herself up and added hastily: "What a funny shaped rock that is sticking out of the hill back of the

house! It looks like a wolf's head, doesn't it? I saw a stuffed one, once."

"By Jove, that's what it is!" Cliff exclaimed. "It's Wolf's Head Rock, up in the Catskills; I thought I'd seen it before! That was taken when his daughter was visiting her old nurse, Sneed said."

"Ethel, I want you to come into the laboratory and let me bandage your hands for you." Henry rose.

"Oh, no, I—it's almost well now, thank you!" Ethel dropped the picture and put both hands behind her as she backed away. "I—they don't need to be bandaged any more."

"Ethel, you will do as Doctor Corliss wishes!" Rex ordered peremptorily. "How did you burn yourself, anyway?"

"It was up in Mr. Sneed's apartment that afternoon you sent me to look through his daughter's rooms," Ethel replied with obvious reluctance. "The old manservant had left a pot boiling over on the kitchen stove and as I passed through there I stopped to lift it off, and the handle was hot and some of—of the soup that was in the pot spilled out on me. It's real good of Doctor Corliss but I don't need any fresh bandages—"

Still protesting, she nevertheless followed the pseudo-physician into his laboratory, and the panel closed behind them.

"Do you know, Sneed's hand would be one of the easiest to imitate of any I have seen in ages?" Cliff folded the two wills and placed them, together with the little snap-

shot, in his pocket. "By Jove! That rascally lawyer doesn't know about this second will; what if I were to introduce a still later one and give him his choice of the two to submit for probate? This is of course in the event that we locate Sneed's daughter, and no other provision has been made for her. In a new will I could cut out the legacies to the servants and to charity, give Hodge just enough to interest him and bequeath the remainder of the estate to the daughter, naming some trust company to administer it for her. It seems a lot like trying to play the god in the machine, I admit, but what do you say?"

"It is a splendid idea if you can carry it out," Rex commended. "However, we must find the girl first. From the moment when George rejoins us we will have to reorganize our whole investigation, won't we, Phil? You are still our leader, you know."

"Well, if I am you can hear me yelling for help right now!" Phil returned. "We haven't located that accomplice yet who had access to the hotel stationery and slipped the second letter under the door, and we haven't a line on where Raeburn dropped off the face of the earth—"

"I think I have," Rex interrupted quietly. "I traced him to the Pennsylvania Station the night before last and found where he'd doubled on his tracks. Yesterday afternoon I did a little further trailing and although I can't promise anything definite now I honestly think it is worth following up."

"Go to it, then!" Phil invited. "Henry and you, Luce,

had both better get back to the Burlingame and try to spot the accomplice, but we'll keep Ethel here, I think."

He glanced once more at Rex who nodded.

"Yes. She might do more harm there now than good if she persisted in carrying on an independent investigation," he agreed. "I am afraid it will be a disappointment to her but her place is here, in the work we have trained her for."

Yet when Ethel returned with Henry she accepted the ultimatum with a resignation which bordered on indifference, seeming to forget her earlier request that she be permitted to prolong her stay at the Burlingame.

"I'll have to go back, though, to pack my things and give up my room," she reminded them. "Can I get it over with now? I'll be here again in an hour."

Henry prepared to accompany her but when she had started for the elevator he lingered with a curious expression upon his rotund face.

"Were Ethel's burns very severe?" Rex asked.

"That's what I waited to tell you." Henry's tones were weighty with significance. "She wasn't burned at all, but every bit of the skin on her fingers, palms and wrists has been *flayed* off! I didn't tax her with it for she wouldn't have admitted it or explained, and I don't pretend to account for it: I'm just giving it to you for what it may be worth."

When he, too, had departed the rest stared at each other and Rex exclaimed:

"'Flayed!' But what on earth could she have been doing to strip the skin from her hands?"

Luce shrugged again.

"Ethel is a plucky little thing and she will probably tell us in her own good time. She is apparently none the worse for her experience, whatever it was.—Before you start out on the trail of Raeburn again, Rex, suppose we have a look at that dispatch box we brought from Sneed's safe last night? I don't believe Phil will have much difficulty in opening it. Where is it, anyway?"

"It's in my study; I'll get it." Cliff rose and left the room, to return bearing the black tin box which he placed on the table before them.

"There doesn't seem to be anything in it," he remarked.

"Oh, yes, there is. I distinctly heard some papers rustle inside it when I took it from the safe." Rex picked up the box and shook it as he spoke, and a look of almost comic amazement spread over his face. "Why, I believe you are right, but I could have sworn—!"

Phil approached with a slender, highly tempered tool steel instrument and as he inserted it in the tiny lock he smiled grimly.

"Somebody has been before us, all right! This lock has been picked and there are fine scratches all around it!"

"Impossible—!" Rex was beginning and then suddenly checked himself. Could it have been Ethel? She had been alone in the room with that box but a few minutes before, and it was the only time it had been out of his immediate possession since he removed it from the dead man's safe.

Every instinct within him cried out against the possibility but cold logic forced it upon him and in a storm of conflicting emotions he heard the lid of the box fall back and Phil's exclamation:

"Empty!"

CHAPTER XX

“IT WAS NOT I!”

THE sky was overcast and a chill drizzle of rain had commenced to fall as a spare, gray-haired man carrying a violin case and a shabby, old-fashioned valise rounded the corner of a quiet street in a section of the city which a generation or two ago had been residential. The houses which faced each other across the broken pavement were uniform in appearance, each with its yellowing grass-plot in front and straggling vines of wisteria and ivy clambering over the wrought-iron balconies and up the faded brick surface of the walls as though vainly striving to conceal the evidences of deterioration.

Some of the houses were boarded up but most of them displayed in a lower front window a card announcing that rooms were to be let and it was before one of the latter midway in the block, that the elderly stranger halted for a moment and then proceeding up the walk he ascended the steps and rang the bell.

There was a certain air of distinction about him despite his threadbare attire, and his springing step belied the age to which his silvery hair attested, but his voice was tremulous and scarcely above a whisper as he addressed the slatternly maid who at length opened the door.

“I have come to take the room—the room on the top

floor which I saw yesterday. Is Mrs. Connelly at home?"

"No, but it's all right. You can go up; I've got it fixed ready against your coming." The woman had admitted him to the hall but stood blocking the staircase with her angular figure and, comprehending, the newcomer put down the violin case and valise and reached for a thin, worn wallet. From it he extracted two bills which he handed to her, together with a quarter which he produced from another pocket.

"Here is the rent for a week and a little change for you for your trouble." He spoke with old-fashioned courtesy and the woman stared. "I am sure I shall be quite comfortable."

"Thanks, sir." She stepped aside as he picked up his meager baggage once more and added: "The missus said I was to remind you that there wasn't to be no fid—playin' after ten at night and the gas in your room works on a meter."

"I shall remember," he replied. "You need not bother to come all the way up these stairs; I know the way."

The woman stared open-mouthed until he had rounded the landing on the second floor, then shaking her head she returned to her kitchen while he proceeded to the top floor. Entering the hall room at the back he carefully closed and locked the door behind him and depositing his burden on the narrow bed he took careful stock of his surroundings. In addition to the bed, the room contained merely a rickety chair and bureau upon which stood a cracked pitcher and bowl, with a row of hooks beneath a shelf from which a

greasy, chintz curtain hung. Its single window looked out upon a dreary expanse of back yards with their inevitable litter of refuse and network of clothes-lines and as he opened it a sharp, autumnal swirl of wind drove a spatter of rain in upon him. A narrow iron balcony ran from his window to the two in the larger room which took up the remaining space across the rear of the house and from an opening in the center a rusty ladder was suspended to the fire-escape below.

Drawing from his coat pocket a flat, oblong mirror, not unlike a traveller's shaving glass, the elderly man crept out on the window sill with infinite caution and keeping close to the wall he advanced a step or two toward the other windows. There he halted and reaching forward he thrust the mirror quickly into the iron scroll-work which topped the balcony rail in a position whence it reflected a partial view of the interior of the room next his.

A quick, virile step sounded within and the elderly man drew back, closing the window and pulling down the tattered shade. Next he dropped a coin in the meter by the door, lighted the flaring gas jet and opened the violin case. The instrument he took from it was thicker than the ordinary violin and the sound holes, instead of being the familiar 's' shape, were round, displaying an arrangement of some mechanical contrivance inside; but the strings twanged resonantly as he thrummed and tightened the pegs, and gave forth clear if slightly tremulous tones when he drew the bow across them.

Resting the instrument upright against the bed's foot he

turned a small, extra peg half concealed in the scroll and instantly there stole out upon the air the plaintive, melodious strains of an old-fashioned love song. The vibrations and tonal quality were as true as though a living hand were wielding the bow, and the footsteps in the next room ceased abruptly.

After listening for a moment the elderly man nodded as though satisfied and turned to his valise. From it he took first a screw driver, a light hammer with a padded head, an auger and some nails. These he laid upon the bureau top and then produced a second mirror, oval and with a jointed metal arm, and lastly a funnel-shaped object like a small megaphone. Under cover of the wailing, long-drawn notes of the violin he affixed the mirror to the window casing with soft strokes of the hammer in such a manner that the arm could be turned to bring the mirror to any desired angle. Then thrusting aside the curtain beneath the shelf he cautiously commenced to bore with the auger in the thin wall which separated his room from the next. When he had made a hole sufficiently large he inserted the mouthpiece of the megaphone-like instrument and dropping the curtain he switched off the music of the violin, turned out the gas and raised the window shade once more.

With the cessation of the melody the footsteps in the next room recommenced once more, sounding with startling clearness through the instrument which the new arrival had installed in the wall, but he seemed oblivious to them as he stood patiently turning the mirror this way and

that. It reflected first the rear wall of the opposite house, then a vista of gray skies and slanting rain and finally, as though directly facing it, a window of the room next door, refracted through the small mirror on the balcony.

Drawing up the rickety chair, the elderly man seated himself, chin in hand, and gazed steadily at the picture before him. It presented an oblique section of the next room, showing the door leading from the hall, a worn arm-chair, a broad expanse of grimy counterpane and the corner of a table upon which stood a vacuum bottle and the remains of a sandwich. Between the bed and the table a narrow strip of dingy carpet was spread and all at once the occupant of the room appeared in the range of vision.

He was a tall, broad-shouldered young man, tanned as though from much exposure to a blazing sun and he walked with a free, swinging stride that narrowly avoided the furniture cluttered in his path. As he turned he glanced out of the window and seemed for an instant to gaze straight into the eyes of the watcher in the next room, but his own eyes were clouded with some inward anxiety and he ran his hand impatiently through his thick brown hair.

At that moment the stairs creaked and a slow, dragging step halted upon the landing. The young man started and turned expectantly to the door, calling out even as a knock sounded upon it:

"Come in!"

The door opened and the frowsy head of the maid appeared in the aperture.

"It's an old man to see you, Mr. Ray. He said you expected him but I wasn't sure and I thought I'd better find out."

"Thanks, Maggie." The young man she had called 'Mr. Ray' took a coin from his pocket and held it out to her. "What does he look like?"

"Well, he's neat-appearin' and kind of strong-lookin' for all he's bent, as if he might have been husky in his day. He's smooth-shaved and speaks awful low and deep." She hesitated as though vainly seeking words to augment her description. "He ain't a gentleman like you sir, but then again he ain't tough; he's got a real nice manner."

"That's the fellow I've been waiting for!" Mr. Ray announced and then added hastily: "Maggie, this room here next mine has been let, hasn't it? I thought I heard somebody playing a fiddle in there."

He had lowered his voice, but the words carried distinctly through the instrument in the wall, and the mirror gave back Maggie's nod of assent.

"Uh-huh. It's an old gentleman, the seen-better-days kind. He's dreadful shabby and poor-lookin' but you can tell he's lived in places different from this! He used to be a music teacher, he told the missus. I wisht I'd heard him playin'.—Gee! I forgot your company!"

The door closed and the stairs creaked once more beneath her descending feet as the young man recommenced his rapid striding to and fro. All at once he paused, listening, and then, advancing, he flung the door open again.

Slower, heavier footsteps were mounting and in the doorway appeared an elderly figure clad in respectable black. His frame was massive despite the bent shoulders and his features rugged and clean-cut, but his eyes were burning with feverish brightness and the straight lips were pressed so tightly together that they trembled.

"Shut the door, Albert, and sit down." The young man spoke peremptorily, but his tone had softened as though with affection. "What news have you brought? You are late."

"I know. I couldn't manage to come before." The visitor's voice was low and deep as the maid had said, and if he had added "sir" to his reply it could not have been more unmistakably deferential, albeit he spoke with a certain reserve as he seated himself in the armchair. "He has gone."

"Gone!" the young man exclaimed sharply. "How do you know?"

"They're saying about the hotel that he is making a trip out West, but he was there yesterday morning, and all day the shades were up at the windows." There was a significant note in the last words and the other said impatiently:

"I know that! I was watching.—But why didn't you meet me last night? I found a message saying that you would come here this morning when I got back after waiting till nearly midnight. You're keeping something back from me! What is it?"

"There were some strange men there last evening; the same ones the manservant brought on Saturday."

"I've got their number; they're private detectives but we have nothing to fear from them!" The young man spoke with quick contempt. "Go on!"

"The proprietor was with them on the top floor for an hour, and he's not been himself since. I saw him after he'd left them and again this morning and he looked as though he were seeing ghosts. That's—that's not all; the manservant was found dead in his bed this morning."

"'Dead!'" repeated the young man, and his reflected face stared from the mirror next door into that of the man who watched like a mask of blank horror. "Dead! Did you see the body?"

"No. I could not get in. The house physician said it was heart disease and I understand the body has been removed to an undertaking establishment. I shall inquire the address and go to see for myself."

"Why? What do you want to look at him for?" The question was blurted out as though without the young man's conscious volition and the visitor raised his head, for the first time staring the other down.

"Because I want to be sure that it is the servant and not the master," he responded in low but firm tones. "There were two there yesterday; now one is dead and one has gone, but which is which? No one appears to know but the proprietor."

"Nonsense!" The young man thrust his hands deep in his pockets and turned to pace up and down once more.

but there was a manifest uneasiness in his tone. "Why would the proprietor stoop to such a purposeless deception? There's the house physician, too; he must have identified the body and he wouldn't be issuing any false death certificates! What would be the good?"

"It would save the hotel from notoriety that would ruin it in—in case there had been foul play."

"So that is what you have been getting at!" He laughed in a short, ugly fashion. "You're afraid we've been cheated, eh? God knows there is no one on earth who has greater cause to wish harm to that old wretch than I and yet his death would be the hardest blow that could fall on me now."

"Maybe it wouldn't be; maybe it would bring to light things that couldn't be found out while he was alive to prevent it." The old man was bending forward in his chair with his huge rheumatic hands clutching his knees. "You know what he has done to you but how do you know that he mightn't have done as bad or worse to someone else? How do you know there mightn't be others who had cause to hate him enough to kill him?"

"Look here, do you know anything that you haven't told me?" The young man had wheeled suddenly upon his companion. "Do you *know* there has been foul play and that it is—?"

"Not likely!" The visitor sank back in his chair and a little of the burning intensity faded from his eyes. "It was just an idea that came to me. It seems a bit queer,

the manservant dying like that, and as for the other one going away—”

“Running away, you mean!” Again there came that bitter, contemptuous laugh. “I suppose that is what those counsellors he has called in have advised him to do; give the signal to gain time and then beat it!—Well it only means hitting the trail again till I find him and this time there’ll be no half measures! I’ll get the truth out of him if I have to wring his scrawny old neck!”

The visitor bent sidewise to pick up his hat which he had deposited on the floor and when he straightened and looked up at his companion once more he shook his head doubtfully.

“How will you go about it? Besides, he may come back. I know it’s hard, but wouldn’t it be best to wait until we see what happens here? Maybe I can get into those rooms of his now that they are empty and let you in to look about—”

“Wait! That is all that I have done for weeks and months and years!” The young man raised his clenched hands above his head. Then they fell helplessly at his sides and he added in a dull, spiritless tone. “But you’re right; I haven’t a starting point now. I should have stopped to think of the possibility that he might run away but when I discovered that he had anticipated a certain move of mine, even though he did not know that I contemplated it, I saw red! I suppose there is nothing that I can do now except to lie low and wait until he returns, as

he will when he thinks the coast is clear. Get in his rooms if you can and try to find some clue to where he has gone."

The old man rose.

"I'll try," he promised. "You'll want me to report to you here?"

"Yes. You've been a wonderful help, a real pal!" The young man held out his hand. "I don't know what I should have done without you—!"

"Don't!" The protestation broke like a cry from his visitor. "I have only been paying my debt. I'll come to-night if I can get away."

He hesitated a fraction of a minute, then seized the other's outstretched hand in a mighty grip. The next moment he turned and was gone.

Left alone, the young man flung himself into the chair just vacated and struck its arms viciously with his clenched hands, while his lips moved as though he were seeking to give utterance to an imprecation but no sound came. Then his head sank forward on his breast and he remained for some time lost in such profound reflection that he was unaware of a series of faint sounds which penetrated from the next room until the strains of the violin broke in once more upon his reverie. It was no plaintive love song now, but the overture to some half-forgotten opera, and although the martial passages sounded a trifle thin, the brilliant if somewhat mechanical sweeps of the arpeggios fell in with his turbulent mood. He rose and began his restless pacing of the floor, oblivious to the fact that for a fleeting moment a shadow had further darkened the gloom of the day,

and a small object which had rested unnoticed in the scroll-work of the balcony railing had disappeared.

Presently the music stopped abruptly in the middle of a bar and the young man roused himself with an effort from his troubled thoughts. Going to one of the windows he flung it wide and stood gazing out at the depressing drizzle until a knock sounded upon his door.

"Come in," he called wearily without turning his head.

The door opened and someone entered, closing it softly behind him, but no one spoke until the young man wheeled about as though suddenly scenting danger and found himself confronting a man of middle age with traces of gray powder still clinging to his dark hair and something which gleamed sinisterly in one hand.

"So you've found me, have you?" The young man was white to the lips. "You can put up that toy gat! I won't run away, as you advised your client to do; you, and the rest of your crew who call themselves 'The Shadows!'"

"Thank you, Mr. Raeburn; I will accept your word." Rex Powell dropped the pistol into his pocket. "You are mistaken, however; we did not advise our client to run away if you refer to Phineas Sneed. He is dead."

Raeburn started back, a choking, unintelligible sound issuing from his throat, but he looked the question he could not utter and Rex shook his head.

"No. His body has not been palmed off as that of his manservant, in spite of the suspicion which your friend voiced just now. Old Robert has passed away, too, but his

death was a natural one and the diagnosis of heart disease was correct. Phineas Sneed was murdered!"

"Murdered!" Raeburn found his voice in a strangling gasp. "It was not I!"

"I know that it was not," Rex returned quietly. "Our purpose is at one with yours now, Mr. Raeburn. Shall we sit down and try to understand each other?"

CHAPTER XXI

ETHEL TAKES A VACATION

“ALL I’ve got to say is that you seem to have a darned intricate code of ethics!” grumbled Cliff. He was seated before the desk in his study, idly scrawling detached letters and odd curves and slanted lines in imitation of the handwriting in the will which Phineas Sneed had himself drawn. “You know you got the dope about the Gull’s death from Red Jim or his daughter. If they had nothing to do with the anonymous letters or the murder itself I can’t see any breach of faith in your questioning them about the Gull’s other friends and associates. You are sure they are out of it but you’re equally certain that the letters at least were partly the work of someone who meant to avenge his memory. You were keen enough to find Red Jim and the girl in the first place—!”

“What if I was?” demanded Phil belligerently as he paused in his impatient stride about the narrow confines of the room. “I didn’t say I found Red Jim or got any dope from him, either, but even if I knew where he was do you think I would go to him and worm my way into his confidence to try to find out if maybe one of his own pals croaked old Sneed for railroading the Gull to his death? Not me! I’m not that much curious about how it happened to try to make a pal turn snitcher!”

“We’re not turning him over to the authorities, you

know, whoever he is!" Cliff retorted. "What Rex said about self-defense is on the level and we'd all have to testify to the evidence that a duel had taken place. You're running this show and I should think you would take a sort of pride in carrying on to the finish."

"I'm going to find out who croaked Sneed, all right, if I can do it without dirty work, but if I can't I'm willing to quit!" Phil's eyes were ominously bright and he was about to amplify his remarks when the panel behind him opened and George appeared.

"What are you two arguing about?" he asked, dropping his damp hat unceremoniously on Cliff's scattered papers and depositing his lanky frame in the nearest chair. "Lord, but I have had a day of it!"

"Did you get away with the formalities safely? Was the death certificate accepted without question?" demanded Cliff anxiously.

"Absolutely. Tomorrow I shall remove my poor uncle's remains from the undertaker's to their last resting place. I don't mind telling you though, my brethren, that I had some squeamish moments!" George passed a capacious handkerchief over his face and emerged from it to ask suddenly: "But what is on the mind of our honorary member? I see she is at her desk again in the outer office, but she looks as though she had been caught in somebody's jam closet and the stolen sweets had not agreed with her."

"You remember the despatch box we took from Sneed's safe last night?" Cliff spoke in a cautious understone. "She is the only one of us who was alone with it for a

minute, and immediately afterward we discovered that its lock had been picked and the contents taken. Added to that she lied about the injury to her hands and a few other little details of her stay at the Burlingame. She doesn't know yet that we are on about the despatch box but Rex is going to have it out with her and if she refuses to come clean and tell us why she has tried to double-cross us the Shadows will be looking about for another secretary. She's a nice kid and I warned Rex that she was too young and impressionable to take into our confidence, but he wouldn't listen."

"Too bad!" George shook his head. "She might have made mistakes but I would have banked on her loyalty!—Where is Rex, anyway?"

"He's been out since morning on some trail he picked up yesterday, that he thinks may lead to Raeburn, and Henry and Luce are back at the hotel in their former roles to see if they can get any clue to Sneed's daughter. Phil has still got the Gull's prison number on the brain and I am practicing our late client's handwriting." Cliff moved the rain-spattered hat ostentatiously as he spoke. "Ridgeway has been literally hanging on the telephone all day to learn if he is safely out of the woods, and I might conclude that altogether a pleasant time has been had by all!"

"Somehow, I can't believe that Ethel has turned crooked!" Phil ignored Cliff's flippancy. "Whatever she thinks of the rest of us, Rex is a sort of god in her eyes and she wouldn't sell him out for all the money in the world!"

"I don't say that she would sell any of us out but she's an obstinate little—!" Cliff broke off to add in a hasty whisper: "There's someone in Rex's consulting room! Do you suppose Luce or Henry—?"

He had no time to complete the query for a light tap sounded on the panel and the next moment it was pushed aside to reveal Rex himself.

"I hoped you had returned, George!" There was a note of repressed excitement in his tones. "Come in, all three of you. I want to present to you our new client!"

Phil and George crowded unceremoniously through the narrow space and Cliff followed in a more dignified manner, but at sight of the figure standing by the table the trio halted in common amazement.

"Raeburn!" Phil exclaimed when he could find his voice.

"Did you say 'client'?" Cliff turned with slightly raised eyebrows to Rex, but George smiled broadly.

"So you have decided to take the advice of the great Zadkiel?"

"I have been persuaded." Their erstwhile neighbor from across the corridor bowed gravely. "Gentlemen, I am in your hands. Had I consulted you when I first learned that your organization existed much that has happened in the last few days might have been averted, but I have lived through an experience which taught me to trust no one."

"I gathered that from your admissions to Zadkiel—" George began but Phil interrupted him.

"Did you ever hear of a fellow called 'the Gull'?"

"Do you know where Mr. Sneed's daughter is?" Cliff supplemented.

"One at a time!" Rex warned. "I have convinced Mr. Raeburn that our interests are identical with his and have brought him here that you may hear his story from his own lips. It will save time, however, if I tell you that he knew nothing of Mr. Sneed's death nor the manner of it until I told him, and he is as ignorant as we are of the whereabouts of Eva Sneed. Needless to say, he was unaware that her father kept her sequestered in his own apartments."

"And she is as sane as you or I!" Raeburn's enforced self-control was for the moment lost and his voice broke in a harsh cry. "Unless that beast has driven her crazy by his cruelty during the last five years, her brain is as normal as that of any woman alive! How she managed to escape just at this time I cannot imagine nor do I dare to think what may have become of her, penniless, weak from long confinement and utterly friendless in a strange city! It was hideous enough, God knows, to think of her as penned up in some sanitarium, but now—!"

"You must try *not* to think of that, Mr. Raeburn, or you will not be able to help her," George interposed. "Sit down and collect yourself so that you may tell us as clearly and concisely as possible just what you know of the events of the past fortnight. Remember that while we were working at cross purposes there was small chance of either

you or our organization being successful in our search for Miss Sneed, but co-operating we cannot fail!"

He had unconsciously called into play all the power of mental suggestion which in the past had rendered his seances so popular, fraudulent though their aim then had been, and his resonant voice rang with a sure conviction. Raeburn's haggard face lightened as he seated himself, then he shook his head.

"I'm afraid I can tell you little of the past two weeks that you do not know already, and nothing which has any bearing on Miss Sneed's escape. I dictated the anonymous letters; I confess that freely, and a friend of mine wrote them. This friend is located temporarily at the Burlingame, as you have surmised, but further than that I shall give you no information concerning him until I have seen and talked with him. He has acted throughout solely in my interests, with a loyalty which two years ago I would not have believed a human being capable of!" He paused and then added hesitatingly: "You have heard Sneed's story; perhaps it would be as well for you to hear mine."

"We know much of it now, for we were able to read between the lines while we were listening to Sneed, even before we knew that you were on the level," George remarked. "I believe you met Miss Sneed at a house party in England while she was visiting a school friend during vacation?"

"Yes." Raeburn flushed. "A man doesn't find it easy to bear his innermost thoughts and emotions to others, but I loved Eva Sneed almost at first sight, I think, and

she cared for me. I know that, and nothing, not even these years of separation and mental anguish could have changed her! That faith is all that has kept me from going mad myself! I had met her father previously here in New York through a financial deal, and although I liked neither his business methods nor his personality I did not dream what a treacherous, despicable creature he was at heart, nor the depths of depravity of which he was capable! I wrote to him, asking permission to marry his daughter. I was in a financial position to take care of her in comfort and even some luxury, with big promises ahead. Sneed replied in a noncommittal but cordially pleasant manner and followed by the next steamer.

"For a month or two he temporized; Eva was too young, a mere schoolgirl, and my future was not yet firmly enough established for me to assume responsibilities; we could both afford to wait for awhile and be sure of our own minds. It sounded reasonable and he interposed no objection to our seeing as much of each other as we wished, but instead threw his home open to me and made me a favored guest. Gad, what a credulous, trusting fool I was!" He struck his palm with his clenched fist. "My liking for the man did not increase, but the thought never once occurred to me that he could be secretly working against me, bringing all his wealth and influence to bear on ruining me! Even when my prospects mysteriously failed and my small capital was swept away I did not suspect that he was at the bottom of it! His sympathy was so ready, his suggestions for the future so soundly based!

"A proposition was made to me to look into some mines in the Balkans and when I returned to England I found that Eva had been taken ill with some sort of fever and removed to a nursing home. I was not permitted to see her but the reports which her father transmitted to me were reassuring at first and it was only when my importunities became too pressing that he told me her reason was affected and that she might never regain her sanity. I was compelled to believe his statement of her condition for he backed it up with written diagnoses by physicians of high repute—forged, I am convinced, but how he obtained them I do not know.

"What I did not believe, however, was that her mind was permanently affected. I was certain that time would bring about a cure and that when she came to herself she would be my own girl again, with her love for me unchanged!" His voice broke and for a moment he covered his eyes with his hand. His hearers said no word but waited until he had regained control of himself and could continue.

"That moment would have been well worth waiting a lifetime for, gentlemen, but meanwhile my affairs were ebbing lower and lower. Everything I touched seemed doomed to disaster, and still I laid it to a mere run of hard luck. The reports of Eva's condition grew more and more depressing and although I did not lose faith I felt that England was stifling me and as long as I could do nothing for her nor even see her I would be better out of the country for a time.

"Then came the South African proposition. It was so rosy, so alluring that I should have suspected the truth there and then, but the offer came through a firm of unquestionable standing and there had been no whisper of any connection between it and interests controlled by Sneed. I jumped at the chance and went to a living hell!"

Again he paused but this time there was no sign of weakness. His firm jaw set and his eyes flashed as the past rose before his mental vision and still his listeners refrained from interrupting his train of thought. After a minute or two he went on more composedly:

"The expedition was more in the nature of exploration than development and took me into the very depths of the most fever-infested district known to civilization. I was taken with it, of course, as every white man is and why I did not succumb as the majority do I don't know, except that it may have been because of my determination to live, to make good and return to the woman I loved. I had three years and a half of it, three years and a half of such torment as I could wish no other man to endure, and then an accident necessitated my going to Cape Town for a consignment of machinery and supplies. There I ran into a miserable wreck of a man who had been in the London office of the company but had been turned adrift and was going to the devil fast. From him I learned of the whole vile scheme which Sneed had set in motion against me and guessed the motive for it and the truth about Eva!

"But I was helpless! My body was wasted and racked with fever and I was penniless and without influence. My

strength failed and a fresh attack laid me low for months. I made my way back to England at last and so few people even recognized me that I was able to make inquiries about Sneed and his daughter without arousing undue suspicion. He had taken her back to America with him; that was all I was able to learn for a long time and then another victim of Sneed's duplicity crossed my path. He was a physician, once reputable but now a hopeless drunkard and from him I dragged the truth that Eva had never been insane, but he had been bribed with the unfulfilled promise of a sanitarium of his own, to make the way smooth for her to be adjudged incompetent! In an unguarded moment Sneed had told him that if ever a certain undesirable lover of his daughter reappeared on the scene to claim her openly he would crush him again as he had once before and place her in an asylum from which she could never be taken!

"You see now, gentlemen, how my hands were tied and why I could not openly go to the authorities and demand her release. I could not prove her sanity. I was still a mere penniless adventurer while he was a man who had been prominent in the financial life of the country for a generation. I returned to America but did not reveal myself to him, for an erroneous report of my death had gone out from Africa and I preferred to have him believe it until I could strike.

"Then luck came my way at last; this Western proposition loomed on the horizon and I got in on the ground floor. In a few months I was rich even for these times of colossal fortunes and two weeks ago I came back de-

terminated at last to claim my own. While out made a firm friend in whom I was forced to spite of my past experience. I had confided to certain extent and he returned a few weeks ago. He installed himself where Sneed lived—it was enough to locate him—and the first of the letters was sent.

"In the meantime I had heard of your organ almost decided to put myself in your hands but of distrust which Sneed's damnable persecution in my consciousness held me back and I took across the hall so that I could watch you and try myself that you were on the level."

"You had nothing to do with the attempt two ago last Sunday to break into Sneed's safe?" "He contain himself no longer.

"I did not even know that he possessed a safe until your colleague here told me about it and Raeburn responded. "I obtained as complete a list of the private establishments for the insured near the city and made the rounds in the interest. I was not spying upon you, but I was not as diligent in my inquiries as I should have been, I am afraid I could obtain no information. I trailed this gentleman Raeburn gestured toward Phil,—“but the result tended to increase my doubt and distrust. That is why I followed you, sir, to Coney Island."

"I know it but you didn't bite until Monday. At that time we knew that you were taking a persecu-

in our activities and I was ready for you!" George grinned again. "I thought I had succeeded in convincing you that whatever the nature of your problem was, it would be safe in our hands, but I must have overreached myself."

"No. I knew it was bunk, of course, but I didn't think you had recognized me and there is a grain of superstition in the most practical of us. I have the gambler's instinct and I had fully decided to consult with you on Tuesday morning when I encountered Sneed himself issuing from your offices here in your company. I realized, of course, that he had been before me in engaging your services, and now I would have you to fight as well as him, and I determined to bring things to an issue. That was when the second letter was written."

"But what did you intend to do?" George asked. "The signal was given as you suggested but had it not been what move did you contemplate?"

"I hadn't definitely decided upon the details but I determined with the aid of my friend to force my way into Sneed's presence and under threat of death if necessary compel him to reveal the whereabouts of his daughter. I was desperate, beside myself! I don't say that I would not have killed him myself if he had resisted me, but the issue never came. The shades of his windows were up all day yesterday, as I knew because I haunted that corner of the Avenue as much as I dared without attracting your attention, knowing that some of you would be on the watch, but I didn't get away with it as successfully as I thought." He nodded towards Rex. "Mr. Powell traced

me to the lodgings where I had gone from my hotel and it was there that he found me today. I had learned from my friend of the death of Sneed's servant, but Sneed himself was reported to have gone away for a trip of indefinite length."

"I managed to overhear the conversation between Mr. Raeburn and his friend," Rex observed, and there was that curious note of repression in his voice which his associates recognized. "It was odd, but this friend made a shrewd guess which was not far from the truth. He suggested that someone else other than Mr. Raeburn might have had good cause to hate Sneed and have contrived an opportunity to break in and kill him; that the hotel management probably induced Robert to go away, and arranged for Sneed's burial in his name to avoid the scandal that the news of the murder would cause."

"Indeed!" There was a world of significance in George's unctuous, ministerial tones. "Now, I wonder what could have put such an idea into his head!"

"He must have known—" Phil began, but Cliff interrupted him swiftly.

"He will probably tell us how he came to surmise that there had been foul play when Mr. Raeburn has seen him and persuaded him that we are all working together," he said smoothly with an almost imperceptible inclination of his head in response to an equally slight gesture from Rex. "There are one or two points about those anonymous letters, however, that I would like to have Mr. Raeburn explain, if he will come into my office for a moment. You

and Phil can then be deciding on our next move to find Miss Sneed."

Raeburn rose.

"I'll be glad to tell you anything I can, of course, and I appreciate how you gentlemen have accepted my version of this whole hideous affair. I confess that this latest development has swept the ground completely from beneath my feet and if it were not for my newfound confidence in you I should feel that Eva Sneed were lost to me forever!"

He followed Cliff into the latter's office and when the panel had slipped back securely into place Phil cried in a low tone which trembled with excitement:

"Who is this friend of his! That is what we've got to find out, and we've got to prevent his communicating with him until we do!"

"That's it, exactly," Rex replied. "I not only heard that conversation; I had the next room to Raeburn's and I rigged up a contrivance of mirrors which enabled me to see what was going on in there. When I see that friend of his again I shall know him."

"It is my opinion that you won't have to look far!" George observed. "I will go to the Burlingame with you now, and with the help of Luce or Henry we ought to be able to satisfy ourselves as to the identity of Raeburn's friend. I have a plan which I would like to put in operation then, and I think it will simplify one phase of our investigation."

"What was that?" Phil started as a subdued thud came

to their ears. "It sounded like the entrance door slamming!—Raeburn couldn't have gotten suspicious of our good faith and beaten it, could he?"

Without reply Rex strode to the panel leading to the outer office and thrust it aside. Ethel's chair was empty but placed conspicuously upon her desk was a large envelope addressed to himself in a rounded, childishly unformed hand.

Taking it up he returned with it to the consulting room and broke the seal. George and Phil watched his face darken as he read and finally he crumpled the letter in his hand with a gesture of utter despondency.

"Ethel has left us." There was infinite pain in his voice. "Perhaps I should use her own words and say that she has given herself a vacation without pay for an indefinite period. I had better read the letter to you." He smoothed it out and read:

"Dear Mr. Powell:

I heard what Mr. Nichols and Mr. Howe told Mr. Roper just now. I could not help it because they left that little spring under the desk open so that every word came out to me and I just could not stand it. I know you think I am crooked and yellow and that I have double-crossed you, and you are going to send me away if I don't tell you why I took the papers out of that tin box. I can't tell you, not now, and I am not going to wait to be sent away. I have taken a vacation without pay and I don't know when I will be back. It just kills me to have you think what you do

of me and when I can prove to you different maybe I will ask you to give me my job again. I thought I acted right but I made a mistake and you won't hear from me till I have made up for it. Thank you for all you have done for me.

ETHEL.'"

CHAPTER XXII

THE DEBT THAT WAS PAID

“BUT I don’t understand!” It was late on Thursday evening and Raeburn and George Roper were seated alone in the latter’s elaborately equipped studio connected with the suite of offices occupied by the Shadowers. “I thought we were all to work together, Mr. Roper. I laid my cards on the table and I expected that you fellows would do the same.”

“Patience, Mr. Raeburn,” George counseled easily. He spoke with frequent pauses and there was an alert expression on his face as though he were listening. “You admit that you yourself are at a standstill, that you don’t know in what direction you would pursue your search alone. My associates are merely following certain vague lines of investigation and it would do no good to raise your hopes with possibilities which may come to nothing. We never report to a client until we are at least on the way to a definite result.”

“And meantime I am expected to sit with folded hands while the woman I love may be wandering the streets starving, or seeking the river?” Raeburn cried. “Can’t you realize the torture of my thoughts, and how inter-

minably every minute drags itself out? Any action would be better than this!"

George moved slightly in his chair. A sound, faint but but unmistakable, had reached him and he replied in a loud, firm tone:

"That was where you made a mistake, Mr. Raeburn. You should have thought of that before you allowed your passion to run away with you!"

"My passion!" The other stared. "What on earth are you talking about? What do you mean?"

"I mean that you should have remembered your sole hope of locating the girl was through her father, and when you killed him—"

"*I killed him!*" Raeburn started from his chair. "Have you gone mad, Roper? You know I had nothing to do with his death, that it was the most unfortunate thing which could have happened at this stage of the game! What are you driving at?"

"The truth!" George rose suddenly and towered over the other man. "There is no use in beating about the bush any longer. We know that you killed Sneed; we have known it from the first and only waited to make sure. I don't say that we have not a certain amount of sympathy for you, from your point of view, but unfortunately the law deals only with facts and murder is a pretty ugly fact to face. You watched Sneed's windows yesterday, you saw the shades were up and that he was ready to parley with you at last. You bribed his old servant to let you in to his apartment, you faced Sneed and demanded what

he had so fraudulently kept from you all these years. He defied you, he laughed at you and in a moment of ungovernable fury you snatched a foil from the brace upon the wall and ran him through the throat! When you saw what you had done you took down the other foil and slipped it beneath his dying hand so as to make it appear that a sort of duel had taken place and you escaped, as you thought, scot free, but we have the goods on you now and you'll go to the chair!"

His voice had risen more and more dramatically and he fairly thundered the denunciation, before which Raeburn stood for a moment dazed and silent. Then he found his voice.

"You are a contemptible lot of fakers!" he cried. "I can understand your game, now, and I was a crass idiot to fall for you after all I had seen! You are determined to make out a case against someone and you don't care who is the goat! You know I never entered Sneed's rooms in my life—!"

"Can you prove it?" George sneered. "What is your alibi? Stranger in the city—walking the streets alone for hours—don't even know what streets—! Pah! How do you think that would go before any jury? We've got an open-and-shut case against you, I tell you! You're the only enemy Sneed had, the only person who had—or thought he had—cause to kill him, and you'll go the route for it!"

"No!" A deep but muffled cry came from somewhere in the partition beside them and the next moment the

panel was crashed from its groove and a figure sprang through the aperture. It was that of an elderly man clad in the conventional dress clothes of formal service, massive despite his bent shoulders, and he flung out his huge, gnarled hands before him. "Mr. Raeburn didn't kill Sneed! I killed him! I had waited too long to be cheated at last!"

"Albert!" gasped Raeburn and fell back again in his chair. The five other members of the Shadowers were filing through the panel space with Phil at their head and it was he who demanded in a ringing tone:

"What were you to the Gull? To Arthur Wicks?"

"His father!" The old man's hands fell to his side and for a moment he bowed his head. Then he raised it defiantly and his rugged, clean-cut features took on a rapt look of yearning affection. "His real name was Albert, after me; Albert Waller. He was all that I had in this world and a genius, they said. He would have done great things, but that man—this beast!—got his invention from him and then railroaded him to prison, to his death, so that he might not give to anyone else the fruit of his brain!"

"But, Albert, I never knew!" Raeburn's tone was husky. "Why did you not tell me? I thought that you and Sneed were strangers—?"

"So we were, sir! You've warned me not to call you that, but it can't matter now. I never laid eyes on him till I went to the Burlingame as a waiter a month ago! I was in England, butler to Lord Granby, when my boy was

arrested and he was too proud to let me know. I found out afterwards that he wrote a lot of letters, dating them ahead, and gave them to—to someone he could trust to mail them to me, and all the while he was lying innocent in prison, with the damp and loneliness and injustice of it eating his life away, these letters would come telling me how fine he was doing and how he hoped to have me with him some day! Two years ago there came word that he was going on a journey, and then nothing more. A bit over a year ago his Lordship died and there were many changes, the house being let to them I couldn't abide, so I gave notice and came to America to surprise my boy. But there wasn't any such place as the address he had given, and the only way I knew of to find him was through somebody he had mentioned in his letters. That—that person tried to keep the truth from me, but my boy was dead and I soon learned it for myself.

"It didn't come to me then to take the life of the man who had killed my boy as surely as though he had put a bullet through him. I was just crushed with the weight of it all, for he seemed too big and powerful for me to touch and there didn't seem to be anything left for me to do but to die and be with my boy! I should have, I fancy, but one day by accident I met one of Lord Granby's old friends, a gentleman who had come to America and was on his way to the West to look into some mining interests, and he took me along as butler and general valet for his party. I was taken ill out there, though, and they had to return without me, and then someone stole my money

when I got out of the hospital and I was in sore straits when Mr. Raeburn, here, found me. He took me on with him and saved my life in a railroad wreck—”

“Don’t Albert!” Raeburn covered his eyes with his hand. “You were loyal to me, you made me believe that there was such a thing as friendship in the world, after all! Why did you not tell me that the man who was my enemy had injured you also?”

“We were master and man, sir,” Albert replied with the class instinct of his kind. “My boy’s life and youth and high hopes could not be given back to him again, but when you confided in me, sir, and I learned that ’twas Sneed who had ruined your happiness, too, something began to whisper to me: ‘Kill him! An eye for an eye and a life for a life! Kill him!’ I knew you meant to come back and force him to give up the young lady, but I did not know there was murder in your heart, too. I didn’t even think it until you told me over the telephone the day before yesterday that I was to write him another letter at your dictation giving him twenty-four hours, and then you would settle the score!”

“But Great Heavens!” ejaculated Raeburn. “You didn’t think I meant to murder the man in cold blood!”

“I thought you were desperate enough for anything, sir, and I made up my mind that if there was any killing to be done, mine should be the hand. I’m old and there’s nothing left in life for me, but you’ve everything before you, and then there was the young lady to be thought of. Besides, I owed it to my boy, and ever since I first came

face to face with Sneed in the hotel the whispers that I'd heard to kill him had kept getting louder and louder till I couldn't hardly hear anything else. He'd never give up his daughter to you while there was life in him, but as I told you this morning in your lodgings, maybe his death would bring out things that would never be known while he was alive to prevent it. I meant that the solicitors would have to produce his daughter, sir, or at least tell where she was." Albert Waller seemed to have forgotten the existence of the others who were grouped about him and talked only to Raeburn, as though anxious to explain his point of view to the man who had been his benefactor, and the Shadowers wisely held their peace. "I meant that last night should end it, and I planned that when I went up with the menu for his dinner order I would kill him, and old Robert, too, if he tried to stand in my path. But luck was with me, for an hour before dinner I saw Robert leave the hotel and knew that Sneed would be alone in his rooms for the first time and my chance had come. When I rang the bell he came down and opened his private door himself and I pretended I had a message for him. He took me back up into his livingroom, me with my serviette draped over my arm and my pistol held beneath it! It was only when I looked at all those swords and knives hung on the wall, though I'd been seeing them every day for weeks, that the idea came to me to make him fight for it. Boy and man, I'd fenced with his Lordship for forty years and more, and for all his wickedness, Sneed looked

such a puny, weazened creature standing there before me that it seemed a bit more like fair play.

"I told him who I was and what I'd come for, and he began running around the room and squealing like a rat caught in a trap till I was all but sick with disgust at the sight! Keeping him covered with my pistol I got down those foils from the wall and thrust one of them into his hand. He saw then that there was no escape and he came at me with a rush while I was pocketing the pistol but I parried and the bout was on. For all his years he was as light and quick on his feet as a cat, and then he was fighting for his life and knew it, but I had the science over him even though I was crippled with rheumatism. There wasn't a doubt of the outcome, not from the start, but I played with him for a bit because just behind him as he danced about, sobbing and lunging at me, I could see my boy smiling and nodding as if 'twas a rare game we were playing, that other old man and me!"

He paused to wipe the perspiration from his brow and Luce and Cliff shuddered as Raeburn did at the grim, fantastic picture conjured up by Albert Waller's simple recital.

"'Twas soon over and I got him in the throat with the tip of my foil; a pretty stroke, and clean, if I do say it! I threw the blade from me and stood watching until he'd stopped wriggling and squirming, and all the while I could hear Albert calling out to me: 'Well played, Dad!', as he used to when he was just a little shaver."

The old man reeled slightly, reaching out for support,

and Henry thrust a chair beneath him and eased him into it. For a long minute no one spoke and then Phil asked in a hushed tone:

"Was it you who tried to get into Sneed's safe?"

"Yes. The—the same person who had been mailing my boy's letters to me all the while he was in prison told me about it for he had described it to them, and I wanted to see for myself how it worked. I didn't mean to steal anything, I wouldn't have touched a penny of his cursed money, but I meant to leave a little reminder of my boy there, a letter for Sneed to find and study over the next time he opened the safe. But the person who told me about it didn't know where the spring that worked it was hidden and I couldn't find it myself, so I did the next best thing; when I wrote the first anonymous letter that Mr. Raeburn wanted me to mail to Sneed I put on the envelope the numbers that had been my lad's in prison, to let him know that there was more than one come back from the dead to make him pay!"

"But how did you get into his apartment on that Sunday?" Phil persisted.

"I had watched and seen Sneed go out and the woman-servant, too, and I knew I would only have Robert to deal with. I went up with the menu, pretending I'd misunderstood about not serving any lunch and when I came down again I left the two entrance doors open a bit, the ones above and below the private stairs. I knew Robert would take a nap and I waited until his usual time for it and then went back again. Nobody ever knew that 'twas me

that was there." He drew a deep breath and straightened in his chair. "That's all there is to the story, and I'm not sorry you've got me, for now it'll have to come out what happened to him and the young lady will be brought forward. As for me, I've paid my boy's debt and it don't matter how soon they take me to that chair I've been hearing about."

"Wait! It was self-defense! Sneed had gone suddenly mad and attacked you!" Raeburn cried desperately. "I'll *make* you plead that, do you hear? I suppose I should have killed him in the long run if you hadn't, Albert, and if ever a man deserved his death it was Phineas Sneed! You'll not suffer for it, if I can help it!"

Albert shook his head.

"'Twas not self-defense, sir. I'll not hide behind a lie, and it only means that I shall be with my boy a little sooner, that is all. You'll find your young lady and be happy, and tonight I shall sleep more soundly than ever since I came to America, with my score settled and about to balance the sheet."

The six Shadowers had drawn a little apart and after a brief colloquy they came forward once more and Rex addressed the old man.

"Suppose Mr. Sneed had died naturally or by his own hand, Albert, what would you do now? You are old to be in service and Mr. Raeburn will do much traveling in the future."

"Why, I—I've a bit of a place down in Kent; just a cottage and an old hound or two from his Lordship's

kennels and a few bees. I've always thought to round out my days there—." Albert gazed in a bewildered fashion at his questioner.

"This is Thursday and a ship sails for Southampton on Saturday. We'll see that a ticket is procured for you tomorrow and I, myself, will satisfy the management of the hotel that you are undertaking a certain mission abroad for us. Do you think you can make it?"

The old man still stared and his lips moved slightly but no words came. It was Raeburn who replied for him.

"Make it? Of course he'll make it!" he cried. "It's— it's great of you people to give him this chance! Albert, you are free! You are going home to that little place in Kent, do you hear?"

"Home!" Albert raised himself slowly from his chair and his eyes sought their faces one by one in half-incredulous questioning. "Do you mean that I shall be let go? But the police—! When they know—?"

"They shall never know, Albert." Rex smiled reassuringly. "Sneed's death will be reported from the West in a few days and the report will be confirmed to the satisfaction of anyone who cares to inquire into it. We do not pretend to be your judges and we will leave the question of your guilt to a higher court than that of your fellow-men. Go back to the hotel now and in the morning be prepared to leave when I come for you."

"It's true, then! I'm to go home!" His voice which had been steady all through his confession was suddenly

shaken and his fierce old eyes dimmed. "I cannot thank—I cannot say—!"

"You needn't try!" Phil cried gruffly. "You put a foil in that guy's hand and gave him a chance for his life, didn't you? I'm damned if it isn't more than I would have done in your place!"

"Good-by, Albert. You'll hear from me, too, in the morning." Impulsively Raeburn extended his hand. "Perhaps you have saved me from myself! Who knows?"

The old man looked into his eyes for a moment, then grasped his hand in silence. In silence, too, he bowed to the Shadows and turned to the door.

CHAPTER XXIII

ETHEL OPENS THE DOOR

THREE days had passed; three nerve-racking days and weary nights in which hope and despondency alternated in the minds of the Shadowers and their client, while vague clues and doubtful deductions alike were followed to fruitless conclusions in the vain search for Eva Sneed.

The girl seemed indeed to have vanished into thin air and when on Sunday evening Gerald Raeburn and his six advisers gathered in the offices of the organization black discouragement rode on every countenance.

"I cannot understand it!" Rex paused in his meditative pacing of the floor and turned to the others who were seated about the long table. "Eva Sneed has been a prisoner for five years, she has seen no one but her father and the two servants, with the possible exception of a physician or this lawyer, Hodge. It goes without saying that we cannot approach him until we announce Sneed's death and have arranged for the necessary evidence to prove it, but I doubt that he could help us even if he would.—Very well, then. The young woman has no money, no friends to whom she could appeal, she is clad only in a teagown and satin slippers, and she disappears in

broad daylight in the heart of the city! What is the answer?"

"Obviously, that your premises are wrong somewhere, my dear fellow," Luce drawled. "Miss Sneed *must* have had money and a change of attire, she *must* have had help from some source. These are not the days of magic, though I will admit that her escape from her father's apartment would alone savor of that art. She is in hiding with the connivance of someone, we may depend upon that, and it is my opinion that only with the announcement of Sneed's death will she come forward, if—?"

He halted abruptly, leaving his sentence unfinished, but Raeburn understood.

"If she is really sane, you were going to say, weren't you, Mr. Baynes?" he asked. "I know that you are none of you quite prepared to credit that part of my story and I have no means at hand to prove it to you but I am firmly convinced that it is a fact. One would think that Sneed must have been mad himself to have allowed his unfounded hatred of me to carry him to such lengths merely in order to prevent my marriage to his daughter, when so many other parents have broken up affairs between their children and unwelcome suitors without resorting to medieval methods. Eva had a very gentle character, but with the strength of will which sometimes underlies an apparently yielding disposition, and if her mind has become affected during these last five years she must have been subjected to unspeakable torture! Mr. Powell's summing up of the situation is correct as far as we know and yet Mr. Baynes'

argument seems unanswerable. Her father and his manservant are both dead, the woman Jane has run away, and poor old Albert Waller is on his way to England. These are the only people to our knowledge who could have come in contact with her during the past month at least—.”

“Until she left her father’s apartment,” George interrupted. “There are many possibilities, and though I concede that we seem to have plumbed every one of them—was that the bell?”

He broke off as the buzzer sounded faintly in the outer office and for a moment they glanced questioningly at each other. Then Rex shrugged.

“Might as well see who it is.” He dropped his half-smoked cigarette into the ash tray. “It cannot be anyone for us, though—”

He passed into the outer office leaving the panel wide behind him and they heard the entrance door open. An instant of electrified silence ensued and then came his exclamation:

“Ethel!”

“Yes, Mr. Powell.” A familiar but singularly small and meek voice replied. “I forgot to leave my key in that note to you when I went away but I wouldn’t use it, not knowing whether I—whether you still thought that I belonged or not! I told you that I would c-come back when I could p-prove to you that I wasn’t crooked and—and yellow, and when I could make up for a mistake I made, and that is why I am here!”

“Come in, child.” There was an unwonted gentleness

in Rex's tones. "Don't cry. Whatever mistake you have made, we are not going to condemn you unheard. We are all here, together with someone else who has an equal right to hear what you may have to tell us."

He reappeared, followed by a very downcast and bedraggled Ethel, who darted a quick glance about the table and blushed vividly when her eyes encountered Gerald Raeburn.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "The—the man across the hall!"

"This is Mr. Raeburn, Ethel," Rex said gravely. "He is more interested than anyone in the world in finding Miss Sneed."

She nodded.

"I guessed as much when you came in with him on Thursday, and that is why I—I took a vacation!"

"But how in the world—?" Henry began.

"You didn't even know that there *was* any man interested—" Phil cried accusingly.

"Perhaps the papers which you took from the despatch box—?" Cliff paused.

"No. I've got to tell you all about it from the beginning." She fumbled about in her handbag and drew out a damp and grimy wisp of a handkerchief to wipe her eyes. "I don't know what you're going to think of me but I am not the one that matters now."

"Sit down, Ethel, and pull yourself together." Rex drew forward a chair. "You look as though you had been through quite an experience."

"I'll say I have!" She sank into the chair and tearing

off her hat she let it fall with a weary flop upon the table. "It was coming to me, though! In the first place, I want to tell you that you will never find that wicked old Sneed's daughter because she never lived! He hadn't a daughter, ever!"

"You are mad!" Raeburn burst out.

"What-t!"

"Then who—?" The others stared at the girl as though she had indeed taken leave of her senses.

"The young lady who Mr. Raeburn met in England and who lived for five years shut up in Sneed's apartments was Eva Adair, the daughter of a man who had thought Sneed was his best friend," Ethel explained. "Her parents both died when she was a tiny baby and Sneed was her guardian. She's got just oceans and oceans of money in her own right and that's what gave him his start and what he's been using all these years. That is why he couldn't let her marry Mr. Raeburn or anybody else, and he only locked her up as insane because she discovered the truth about herself by accident. She's no more crazy than I am!"

"I knew it!" Raeburn cried. "Thank God!"

"But how is it that *you* know all this?" George had been watching Ethel narrowly and she flushed again beneath his gaze.

"It's all here in these papers." She had recourse once more to her handbag. "They're the ones I took from the despatch box; the very ones that *she* had seen by accident five years ago in England!"

"How do you know that she did!" demanded Phil. "What made you open that box, anyway?"

"I know because she—she told me so!" Ethel blurted out. "How *can* I tell you if you keep interrupting this way—? I hadn't been in Sneed's apartments an hour before I discovered how she got out of it, and then I found *her*, and hid her away from all of you! Then she ran away from *me* and I could have *died*—!"

"But why, child!" Henry exclaimed. "Why on earth should you have hidden her from us when we sent you there to find her—?"

"Because of what you told me yourself!" Ethel flared out at him. "You were working for Sneed and he had made you believe that she was insane. She had told me everything and I knew she was all right; do you think I was going to be the one to put her back in his hands to be shut up again, this time for the rest of her life? I asked you what you would do with her if she were ever found, and you said that she would be put where she would have every care and attention! She's only a girl like me, even if she is a lady, and I made up my mind then that you would never get hold of her if I could help it! You—all of you, even Mr. Powell—had just trusted me to work on a case with you but she had trusted me with her life and her freedom and I wasn't going back on another girl even for—for business! I ought to have trusted you and given you credit for as much sense as I had, but would *you* have believed she was all there if she had sprung that

on you about not being Sneed's daughter at all, if she hadn't these papers to prove it?"

Henry was silent, but Raeburn cried out once more:

"For God's sake, if you know where she is now, take me to her! I can't stand this suspense much longer! If you have found her again, tell me!"

"I am telling you all I can, sir," Ethel replied meekly. "I found her last week in the linen room at the hotel, right near that private entrance to Sneed's apartment. That was Tuesday afternoon and she had been hiding there for more than twenty-four hours, without any food or anything! At first I was going to call Uncle—Doctor Corliss, but she begged so hard for me to just listen to her that I couldn't refuse. I smuggled her into my room and ordered up tea for her and everything else on the bill-of-fare, hiding her in the closet when the waiter came. Then she told me about—about Mr. Raeburn, and what she'd been through for five years, and I tell you I wouldn't have given her up to Mr. Sneed again if I had had to kill him myself to prevent it!

"I kept her there in my room and gave her some things of mine to wear, so that if anyone *should* catch a glimpse of her they would think maybe it was me, and I hid her in the closet again and sent for the chambermaid. She is a nice girl even if she ain't—isn't over-bright, and I asked her if she could get a position in the hotel for a maid who used to work for me. You see, it came to me that the best place I could hide the young lady would be right there in

the Burlingame under everybody's noses, for that's the last place they would look for her.

"The chambermaid said that the linen room girl for that floor had just left and that was why there hadn't been any service there all day; she thought she could get the place for my maid if I would bring her around in the morning, and I said I would. I gave her ten dollars and a dress I had only worn twice, and I knew she would fix things all right for me. Miss Adair—or Miss Sneed, as I suppose I had better keep on calling her to you—thought she could get away with it, but she had to have the right clothes, and that was why I borrowed that money and went shopping the next day, leaving her locked up in my room. I'd taken her measure, and I brought the things back myself and a whole bagful of changes beside, and dressed her all up even to her hat and coat before I sent for the chambermaid, so that she would look as if she had just come in from the street. The place was ready for her, but before I let her leave me I gave her a hundred dollars in case anything went wrong and she had to make a quick getaway before she could find me. I wished I hadn't afterwards, I'll tell the world! All I had to do then was to find Mr. Raeburn and I meant to do that if I had to advertise for him, but that evening you sent for me and told me Mr. Sneed had been murdered, and that upset everything!

"I went back to my room as quick as I could and sent for her and told her, thinking she'd be pleased to death that all her troubles were over, but she didn't take it that way!—She threw a fit! I had an awful time with her,

and when she did quiet down she got *too* quiet; there was something about her that I couldn't understand, but she went back to her own room in the servants' part of the hotel after awhile and I thought everything would be all right. I wanted to stay near her as long as I could and that was why when I came here to you the next morning I asked if I couldn't remain on at the hotel, but when you said 'no' I saw it wasn't any use. She had told me, of course, about the despatch box she had opened that time in England and what she had found in it, and when Mr. Nichols sent me into his study for the little photograph and I saw a box just like what she had described standing on his table I—I opened it.

"There were the very papers inside, and I took them to give to her, for you couldn't say she was crazy then if she had them to prove what she said, but when I got back to the hotel I found that she had gone away! I saw then why she had acted so when I told her Sneed had been murdered and I could have kicked myself for not understanding before; she thought Mr. Raeburn had done it, of course!

"I gave up my room and came back here; there didn't seem to be anything else for me to do right then, for she knew where to reach me if she wanted to, and I had about made up my mind to tell you everything, anyway. It was all getting a little bit too much for me to handle. Then I heard what Mr. Nichols and Mr. Howe were telling Mr. Roper about me and what you all thought of me, and I felt that I just couldn't face any of you again, after having

found her and then let her slip through my fingers, until I could at least tell you where she was.

"Today, though, I thought I had better come to you without waiting any longer and tell you what I'd done already. You had a right to know, as I'd ought to have seen before, and you stand a better chance of finding her than me. I didn't mean to double-cross you; I only did for her what I would have wanted another girl to do for me if I had been in her place."

Ethel paused and surreptitiously applied the rag of a handkerchief to her eyes once more, but it seemed to Rex that they were sparkling rather too brightly for tears and he asked suddenly:

"But how did Miss Sneed—or Miss Adair—get out of the place where she had been imprisoned so long?"

"I can't tell you very well, but I can show you!" Ethel sprang up and took her hat from the table. "Can't we go to the Burlingame now? It isn't late, and maybe if you see how she did it, it will sort of help. You remember when you first told me about Miss Sneed I said I didn't blame her for escaping, that I would have gotten out of there if I had had to claw the walls down? Well, that is very like what she did, only it was all fixed ready!"

"Shall we go?" Raeburn looked anxiously at the others. "I have wanted to see for myself where my poor girl was imprisoned for so long."

"Come, then." Rex signaled to the others, and under cover of the general move of departure he added in a

lowered tone to Ethel: "Are you *sure*, my dear, that you have told us quite all you know?"

"All except where I've been for the last three days and that doesn't matter now," she replied. "If—if you find the young lady sometime, maybe you'll forgive me for what I did? I don't suppose there will ever be a 'next time' for me but if there was I guess I would have brains enough to trust *you*, anyway!"

There seemed to be something cryptic in her remark but Rex did not press her further and they proceeded to the Burlingame in silence.

Hamilton Ridgeway, the proprietor, beamed upon them, for the burial of Sneed had taken place without a hitch and only the final formalities remained to be gone through. He himself escorted them to the late financier's apartment and would have entered with them, but Rex, at whose command the rooms had been kept locked since the removal of old Robert's body, diplomatically dissuaded him, and it was Ethel who led the way, turning on the main switch which threw the whole apartment into a blaze of light, with Raeburn at her heels.

"You haven't told us the truth yet about how you burned yourself!" Henry pantingly caught up to her as they crossed the little roof-garden, fragrant and still under the starry sky. "I suppose you know, my child, that you didn't fool me with that explanation of yours!"

She nodded coolly.

"Of course I didn't burn myself," she replied easily. "I just *peeled* my hands sliding down."

“Sliding—!”

“Is that where Eva was last seen by her jailors, over there under that pergola?” Raeburn paused to ask.

“Yes, but come on!” Ethel cried impatiently and there was an odd break in her voice. “This is the kitchen. Do you see that dumbwaiter over there in the corner? It only runs down to the next floor, to a pantry that was built in for Sneed’s food to be brought up to, and the pantry is hidden *behind the linenroom*. He was afraid the young lady might try to escape down the dumbwaiter so he had a lock fixed in the handle of the little door and Jane always wore the key to it, but he didn’t know that there was a second opening to it from the wall on the other side! Come!”

The rest had gathered about in time to hear her explanation and they needed no further urging. Impatiently they crowded forward as she led the way into the dressing-room which the captive had used and went straight to the triangular closet in the corner.

“I’d looked about everywhere else but unless the young lady got away in an airplane I saw that it just *had* to be through that dumbwaiter, and if the door was locked then there must be another way to get into it. I don’t know whether you will find what I did or not, but—but you can look!”

Her voice had risen hysterically and as she uttered the last words Ethel opened the door. There was a slight movement in the semi-darkness within and then a woman stepped slowly forth. She was tall and straight and young

but a streak of white ran across her dark, wavy hair from temple to crown and her eyes were shadowed with the memory of infinite pain as she held her wasted arms out before her.

"Gerald! I knew that you would come to me some day like this!"

As a man in a dream Raeburn moved toward her and then with a great cry he caught her in his arms.

"Eva!—Eva, my own!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE REWARD OF A DOUBLE CROSS

“**W**HAT I want to know is: how did you do it!” There was respectful admiration in Phil’s tones as he gazed at Ethel, who, forgiven and reinstated, sat with the six Shadowers gathered about her in the consulting room the afternoon of the next day. “I was supposed to be handling this case but you have taken the wind out of my sails!”

Ethel dimpled.

“Well, I was *looking* for some way into that dumbwaiter shaft, you see,” she explained. “It had to be in that side of the closet wall that backed up against it so I opened the door, but I couldn’t see any sign of a crack. Then I looked at the floor and I saw that there was a little square of lighter wood set in toward the back and I tried to pry it loose. When I couldn’t, I *stood* on it just as hard as I could, and I had the surprise of my life, for the whole two walls which met in a sort of point at the back seemed to just fold over and the lower part slid under the upper one leaving a space at each side. In one of them I noticed what looked like the back of a safe but the other opened as I thought into the dumbwaiter shaft and I found that the dumbwaiter itself was up over my head. I didn’t stop to

think, I just grabbed the rope and slid down it to see where I would land."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Luce. "You might have broken your neck!"

"Well, I didn't," Ethel responded composedly. "I skinned my hands, though, and landed in that little pantry. I heard a noise in the linen room and I called to see if the maid was there, to explain that I had got in the pantry in mistake for my own room which was right beside it, but nobody answered. I thought it was queer, so I went to see what it meant and I found Miss Adair."

"And where did you find her the second time, when you took us to her last night in that dramatic manner?" Rex smiled.

"That wasn't my idea!" Ethel retorted. "It was hers and I had to let her have her own way. It seems that all the years she was kept prisoner there, she dreamed day and night that Mr. Raeburn would come for her and take her away, and she wanted to have her dream come true. As to my finding her again, it was Mr. Nichols who told me where to look."

"I!" Cliff dropped his glasses. "Of all the little—!"

"No, I'm not! When you showed me that photograph of Miss Adair and I said the rock in the background looked like a wolf's head, you said that was what it was; Wolf's Head Rock in the Catskills. Then you told me Miss Adair had been staying with her old nurse up there, and when I thought it over, it gave me an idea. Miss Adair didn't know anybody in New York and when she

ran away from the hotel where I had her fixed, wouldn't her first thought be to get to the only friend she could remember?"

"Great snakes!" Henry rubbed his bald head. "And we've got the nerve to call ourselves detectives!"

"But that was Thursday," George interposed. "Yesterday was Sunday. Where were you all that time?"

"Where was I?" Ethel repeated with a sort of grimness. "If you think the Catskills are like Central Park you've got another guess coming, Mr. Roper! Gee, I never saw anything like those mountains!"

"Beautiful, aren't they?" Luce spoke with pleased surprise at the unexpected appreciation which her emphasis seemed to denote.

"Rocks! Rocks and millions of trees and slimy moss and brooks where you didn't expect 'em, and buzzy, crawly things that bit and stung you all day and made funny noises at night!" The bitterness was undisguised in her tone now. "Anybody can have it that wants it; just give me New York where it's flat and you know what's under your feet, and there's lights and auto horns and *folks* at night! That's all! I'd have been glad to see even a plainclothes bull!"

Cliff choked and Luce turned hastily away, but Rex asked quietly:

"How did you know where to go?"

"I didn't. I just asked the man at the station here to give me a ticket to the nearest town in the Catskills and when I got there it was only a few little houses with the

ground going up all around like the side of a wall! I didn't start till Friday morning and it was afternoon when I got there. Nobody had ever heard of Wolf's Head Rock, so I stayed that night at a kind of a boarding-house and the next day I got on the train again and rode to another place. I don't remember the name of it but there was a big waterfall there, and they told me that Wolf's Head Rock was eleven miles back over the mountains. If you count the straight up and down part I'll say it was nearer eleven hundred! I found a man with a team of horses whose legs bowed out in front to take me there, and then I had to hunt out that house with the windmill. It's all tumbled down now, with weeds growing up all around and the windows broken, but there was Miss Adair fast asleep on the back doorstep!

"It seems she'd got there by another way the day before, and finding her old nurse gone and the place deserted, had just dropped in her tracks! If I was Mr. Raeburn I'd tie a lunchbox to her whenever she goes out, for she's got the worst habit of hiding herself away where there's no food of anybody I ever saw! I took her back with me to the place with the waterfall but she was too weak to travel that night so we had to stay there until yesterday morning.—Now what I want to know is: who fixed the wall of the closet in Sneed's apartment like that?"

"The man who built the safe for him," responded Phil soberly. "I motored out into the country a little way this morning to have another talk with some friends of mine there who used to know him. He told a certain lady just

a short time before he died about installing that mechanism in the two walls of the closet so as to provide a way of getting in and out by means of the dumbwaiter shaft, so I am afraid he was a little deeper in with a crooked crowd than his father will ever know. He must have planned to come back and rob the safe, thinking naturally that Sneed meant to keep something of great value there if he went to all that trouble and expense to guard it, but Sneed had him sent away before he could put his plan into execution."

"And all the time the only thing he wanted to keep in there where nobody could ever find it was that box of papers!" Ethel commented. "I wonder why he didn't tear them up or burn them and have done with it!"

"Possibly because he thought he might need them some day to prove the ownership of his ward's property," Rex suggested. "His will was in the safe, too, you know."

"Yes." Cliff coughed warningly. "I—I have it here. It leaves a hundred thousand dollars to his attorney Ellsworth Hodge and all the rest to his ward, Miss Adair."

"Gee, I wouldn't have believed it after the way he treated her!" Ethel's forehead wrinkled. "How is the lawyer going to put it through all the red tape when he doesn't even know that Sneed is dead?"

"But he is," George said reassuringly. "A steamer on Lake Michigan, outward bound from Chicago, was wrecked yesterday with all on board, as you can read in this morning's newspapers, and Sneed was a passenger. It will take a little time and trouble to verify the fact that he was, of course, but an attorney won't find it difficult,

especially one with a hundred thousand dollars at stake, and the alternative of a different will to file which leaves him nothing. There is another little matter of possible disbarment proceedings in connection with the railroading of a potential crook if Sneed *didn't* die in that shipwreck which may act as an incentive, so I don't think there will be any trouble about the red tape."


"Holy Mike! There isn't *anything* you can't put over, is there!" Ethel beamed about at them with worshipful pride. "Miss Adair says she is going to give me a little string of pearls—*real* pearls, think of it!—when she gets her property settled up, and she is going to send you a big check, too, in addition to Mr. Raeburn's! The only thing that bothers me is that I can't get on to the game yet, for you all took this case at first just like honest-to-goodness dicks! I don't see where the fine work comes in!"

"That is the intention, my dear," George remarked drily. "If anyone suspected who and what we really are the Shadowers would cease to exist."

"Remember you are in on those checks, too, when they come, as well as on the one from Mr. Ridgeway for laying the ghost at the Burlingame," Phil reminded her.

Ethel's eyes shone.

"Gee! Just think how I nearly queered myself by hiding that girl and holding out on you!" she exclaimed. "When I thought Mr. Powell was going to give me the air I could have curled right up and died! I would have deserved it, though, for I had no business to forget for a minute that I was working for the Shadowers!"



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"Never mind, Ethel." Rex laid his hand for a moment on her shoulder. "Had you failed completely in your search when we sent you to the Burlingame it would have been far worse, for the Shadders would have lost their case if you hadn't opened that door!"

THE END.

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